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Abstract

This dissertation examines private gun ownership and its sociocultural and political implications in modern China from 1860 to 1949, a period characterized by foreign invasion, constant military conflicts, and political decentralization. During this period, foreign guns, along with their Chinese imitations, flooded society. In response to the social disorder, many Chinese civilians turned to this new class of weaponry for self-defense. While historians have understood the gun in China in terms of military modernization, this dissertation sets the privately-owned gun in its social and political context, and studies why Chinese civilians chose to arm themselves with guns and how governments of different periods responded to their armed civilians.

This study argues that growing social violence and the state's inability to respond to it led Chinese men and women seek to obtain their own weapons. This demand was fueled by the gun's powerful symbolism in public culture and social life, and by beliefs that guns were a source of social status and self-empowerment. Civilian ownership of guns contributed to persistent social violence, and also transformed power structures in local society and accelerated local militarization, impacting the balance between state and society. Both late Qing and Republican governments' regulation and control over armed civilians was a dynamic and contingent process, hovering between two practices: the state's resolute maintenance of its monopoly on the uses of guns, and its reliance on armed civilians in local defense. This study argues that the state's dilemma over whether to control private guns or rely on them prevented the formation of an effective and consistent gun policy. In contrast, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) adopted a different policy towards private gun ownership, by making the mobilization of an armed populace part of its massline policy. The CCP's private gun policy played an important role in strengthening the CCP's presence and authority in wartime China.

Drawing from a variety of sources such as government documents, legal cases, social survey reports, and popular writings, this study chronicles both the state efforts to deal with armed civilians and the reactions from the bottom. This dissertation engages with and complements wider research on modern Chinese history in examining violence, social life, and the dynamic state-society relationship.

THE PRISM OF VIOLENCE:

PRIVATE GUN OWNERSHIP IN MODERN CHINA, 1860-1949

by

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Dissertation
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in History

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Chronology of Major Events

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The Self-Strengthening Movement: 1861-1895

The Promulgation of the Current Criminal Law of the Great Qing: 1910

The Republic of China: 1912-1949

Warlord Era: 1916-1928

The Canton Merchants' Corps Incident: 1924

Nanjing Decade: 1928-1937

Second Sino-Japanese War: 1931-1945

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INTRODUCTION

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, China witnessed an unprecedented level of social and political transformation. The Qing dynasty began to dramatically decline as the once powerful Chinese empire was laden with overwhelming suffering from within and without. The collapse of the Qing dynasty (1644-1912) and the formation of the Republic (1912-1949) did not bring socio-political stability to China. Instead, the nation was wracked by almost constant warfare, political fragmentation, and unprecedented waves of banditry. Shen Congwen (沈從文 1902-1988), one of the most influential writers of the Republican era, wrote a short essay entitled "Old and New (新與舊 *Xin yu Jiu*)," in which he attributed the escalation of social violence to the proliferation of weapons, which made their way from the hands of soldiers to those of civilians. One theme that Shen expressed in the essay is that the ready availability of guns gave those predisposed to aggression the means to seize local power. The public perception of the 1911 Revolution was in reality its social byproduct: the rise of armed civilians and resultant constant social violence.[1]

Shen's description indicates the existence of a new social phenomenon in modern China that deserves our scholarly attention. Non-military individuals or groups chose to arm themselves with guns in the late nineteenth century, when the central government was impotent to maintain its monopoly on violence. Private gun ownership became surprisingly common during the Republican period, as constant warfare and political decentralization accelerated local militarization. In both periods, Western guns manufactured by companies such as Colt,

[1] Shen Congwen, "Xin yu Jiu," (新與舊, Old and new), in Shen Congwen, *Xin yu Jiu* (Shanghai: Liangyou tushu yinshua gongsi, 1936), 135.

Remington, Winchester, and Mauser, together with their Chinese imitations, flooded local society. Japanese guns, too found their ways into China and were diffused in society.[2] Observing the variety of guns held in private hands led German missionary F. Strauss to conclude that China was a "splendid gun museum."[3]

Ownership of these guns had a profound and heretofore unnoticed impact on Chinese society and ultimately, I argue, national politics. In a time of tumultuous upheaval, ambitious individuals or groups, like the ones in Shen's essay, armed themselves with guns to dominate local society, which helped transform traditional power structures and challenge the state's monopoly on violence. Recognizing the danger of private gun ownership both to society and to their own power, the late Qing government, the Nationalist Government (KMT), and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) made efforts to measure, and in some cases, regulate private gun ownership. As my dissertation shows, the decisions that each political entity made about how to deal with armed civilians had profound effects on the national political arena during the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. The late Qing government officially loosened harsh restrictions on gun ownership, and saw the armed civilians as important power holders to defend the localities, if they were properly regulated. The Nationalist Government followed the late Qing practice, and adopted a regulatory approach, seeking to allow guns to remain in the hands of those it judged to be the "good people (良民 *liangmin*)." The KMT's

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[2] As early as the late nineteenth century, Chinese revolutionaries sought to obtain weapons from Japan, which experienced a successful program of military modernization. The firearm smuggling reached a peak when Japan occupied Manchuria and established a puppet state in the early 1930s, where had become a base for gun smuggling. See Leang-Li T'ang, ed. *The Puppet State of "Manchukuo"* (Shanghai: China United Press, 1935), 122-24.

[3] F. Strauss, "In Perils of Robbers," in *We Are Escaped*, ed. F. Strauss (London: China Inland Mission, 1932), 30.

effort to maintain control over violence and to utilize the armed populace to help the state defend localities led to an inconsistent gun policies. The Communists approached civilian gun ownership differently in the 1930s and 1940s, coopting armed civilians into their ongoing revolutionary project.

The study of private gun ownership in Republican China thus provides a new prism through which to examine state-society relations in modern China. Using a wide range of fresh sources, this dissertation project sheds new light on China's social power structures and state-building efforts. Despite the pervasiveness of fragmented violence brought about by unregulated gun ownership, scholarly investigation of this subject has been rare. To date, almost all studies of arms in China have related to China's military modernization.[4] European and American historians have studied the history of international arms transfers, and examined China's position in the global arms network from the late nineteenth century. Nevertheless, the real influence of

[4] China historians have explored several issues on China's military transformation, ranging from the reception of foreign technology, changes in the organization of the Chinese military, and the ideas of Chinese military officials. Some important works include: John K. Fairbank, ed. *The Cambridge History of China,* vols.10 and 11 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978-1980); Mary C. Wright, *The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism: The T'ung-Chih Restoration, 1862-1874* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957); Wang Ermin 王爾敏, *Qingshi junshi shi lunji* 清史軍事史論集 (Essays on military affairs in the Late Qing) (Taipei: Lianjing chubanshe, 1980). Thomas L. Kennedy, *The Arms of Kiangnan: Modernization in the Chinese Ordnance Industry, 1860-1895* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1978); David Pong, *Shen Pao-chen and China's Modernization in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); John L. Rawlinson, *China's Struggle for Naval Development, 1839-1895* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967). For the historiography of Chinese military modernization, see Richard S. Horowitz, "Beyond the Marble Boat: The Transformation of the Chinese Military, 1850-1911," in *A Military History of China*, eds., David A. Graff and Robin Higham (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2012), 153-74.

foreign weapons on the society of recipient countries are still complex and ill understood.[5] As a consequence, much is known about the various Chinese governments' arduous efforts to acquire Western military technology, but little work has been done on other aspects of the firearm's history in Chinese society.

My research shows that as more private individuals acquired guns, many Chinese localities saw the emergence of military-based elite powers that challenged state authority. Philip Kuhn and Edward McCord's classic studies remain the most important works in the process of militarization. These works demonstrate that local militarization kept the Nationalists from a successful program of state-building.[6] Using that research as a baseline, my work follows the story into the 1930s and 1940s, when militarized elites, local bullies, and others contended for dominance over local society. The new forms of firearms, whether imported from the West or manufactured in China based on Western designs, were the essential tools in this struggle for dominance, and for that reason I place the gun at the center of my research.

To fathom the social, cultural, and political implications of private gun ownership in modern China, the questions at the core of my research are twofold: Why did Chinese people in the modern period embrace private gun ownership? How did the state deal with an armed populace in its state-building efforts? This dissertation posits that private gun ownership was not only a social and cultural phenomenon, but also an important component of Chinese political

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[5] For the history of the arms trade, see Donald J. Stoker Jr. and Jonathan A. Grant, eds., *Girding for Battle: The Arms Trade in a Global Perspective, 1815-1940* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2003); Jonathan A. Grant, *Rulers, Guns, and Money: The Global Arms Trade in the Age of Imperialism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

[6] Philip A. Kuhn, *Rebellion and Its Enemies in Late Imperial China: Militarization and Social Structure, 1769-1864* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970); Edward A. McCord, *The Power of the Gun: The Emergence of Modern Chinese Warlordism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

culture during the late Qing and Republican period. This dissertation argues that Chinese civilians' demand for guns was fueled by the gun's provocative symbolism in social life, including violence, social status, and self-empowerment. Both late Qing and Republican governments' regulation and control over the armed civilians appeared as a dynamic process, hovering between two practices: the resolute maintenance of a monopoly on violence, and the reliance on armed civilians in their efforts to defend localities. Both central and local governments during this period adopted a "control/reliance" approach, which will be explained in the following chapters. A series of programs, including gun registration, licensing, inspection, and smuggling prevention were designed and implemented to maintain social order and stability. In the meantime, the easy access to arms gave rise to a highly-militarized society. Local elites who were able to "translate access to guns and military skills into local power," in many cases, served as agents for state penetration into society."[7] Thus, the political dilemma prevented the formation of an effective and consistent gun policy in modern China.

In the *Cambridge History of China*, Mary Rankin, John K. Fairbank and Albert Feuerwerker argue that "efforts to find a simple progression or a single key to the dynamics of all this change in Republican China founder in the face of the size and geographical diversity of the country, differences of local social organization, and unevenness of development in different spheres."[8] According to this view, it is impossible to find a single model to explain the historical trajectory of modern China, which has been undergoing dynamic transformation and possesses substantial cultural diversity. My research on private gun ownership focuses on just one topic

[7] Edward A. McCord, *Military Force and Elite Power in the Formation of Modern China* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 102.

[8] Mary B. Rankin, John K. Fairbank and Albert Feuerwerker, "Introduction: Perspectives on Modern China's History," in *Cambridge History of China*, ed. John K. Fairbank, vol. 13 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 6.

from which vantage point we can understand many aspects of China from the late nineteenth century to 1949. The introduction of foreign guns, whether through cross-border commerce or contraband smuggling underscores China's involvement with the broader world. Chinese civilians' penchant for the lethal weapon in modern period reveals developments there were not so different than occurred elsewhere in the world, where private gun ownership changed the state-society relationship. It also reveals how Chinese people embraced violence as one part of their social life. The state's regulation efforts and the effectiveness of gun policies allow us to capture the dynamic relations between state and society. From the late 1930s, the armed populace, in the eyes of Chinese Communists, served as an important social force that could be utilized to fulfill their revolutionary agenda. Thus, the gun manifested its multifaceted and fluid nature in China. This dissertation complements our existing knowledge of weapons, violence, state power, and societal change in modern China.

As the first comprehensive study to examine the phenomenon of private gun ownership in modern China, this project uses a variety of primary documents to identify an important but overlooked dynamic in the emergence of the modern Chinese state. This study will engage with existing scholarship in social, cultural, and political history.

Scope

This dissertation focuses on the period from the late Qing's Self-Strengthening Movement in 1860 when foreign guns began pouring into China, to the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. My research takes 1949 as the *terminus ad quem* because with the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Chinese Communist Party successfully used a campaign to suppress "counterrevolutionaries" to disarm civilians. After 1949, the Communist government claimed a monopoly on violence through the banning of private

possession of all firearms. It was from 1860 to 1949 that the general prevalence of privately-owned guns loomed large in social life and political activities throughout China. This period was characterized by foreign invasion, constant military conflicts, and political decentralization. Under such circumstances, people chose to arm themselves when a weak government was impotent to maintain social order and public security. Another reason to focus on this period is that, for the first time in history, Chinese state (both the late Qing and the Republican governments) was not able to defend the monopoly on the distribution of advanced firearms, and even allowed ordinary people to own guns. The state's shifting stances towards an armed populace allow me to scrutinize the process and obstacles of the state building efforts.

Terms

The term "private gun" does not do justice to the variety of guns that circulated in Chinese society. During the first half of the twentieth century, China was flooded with different types of guns, including traditional bird guns, foreign guns of various brands, and their Chinese copies. A few terms became common in this era, including "bird guns 鳥槍," "foreign guns 洋槍," "civilian guns 民槍," and "self-defense gun 自衛槍支." This variety makes definitions necessary. The muzzle-loading matchlock gun transferred from Japan in the sixteenth century had already been localized in the Ming and Qing dynasties. The Chinese called the matchlock "bird (鳥 *niao*) gun," later known as the "native (土 *tu*) gun." When trading restrictions were lifted in 1842, foreign goods started to flood Chinese society. Chinese people called these Western imported goods "洋貨 *yanghuo"*, indicated their "modern" and "superior" status, while symbolizing native made as "pure local goods." Western weapons poured into China in 1860 when China started to learn modern military technology. The western gun was given the prefix

"foreign" (yang), which served to denote its superiority over the traditional Chinese bird gun. However, as Sherman Cochran in his book on consuming Chinese medicine during the early twentieth century suggests, Chinese consumers' distinction between "Chinese" and "Western" was very broad and inexplicit. According to Cochran, "[Chinese customers'] notions of what was 'Chinese' included both old medicine and new 'old' medicine; and their notions of what was 'Western' included Chinese-made 'new medicine' as well as Western-made products."[9] As this dissertation will show, the imitations of foreign guns constituted an important part of civilian weapons. In this sense, if Chinese people began defining the term "foreign" broadly and inclusively, it is no exaggeration to say that such an obscure notion can also be applied to Chinese-made "foreign guns."

Another important term is "private gun ownership," which in my case refers to individuals or groups who were not soldiers. In addition to ordinary civilians, spontaneous collective defense forces organized by local elites are also at the core of my inquiry. These individuals and groups pursued powerful weapons for a variety of reasons, including self-defense, showing their elevated social status, or purely committing violence. My objects of study are those individuals and groups without "a revolutionary agenda at transforming the basic structure of the state."[10] Nevertheless, this does not mean these individual or groups were insulated from national politics.

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[9] Sherman Cochran, *Chinese Medicine Men: Consumer Culture in China and Southeast Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 161. For the Chinese consumer culture, see Frank Dikötter, *Exotic Commodities: Modern Objects and Everyday Life in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

[10] In this sense, my research resembles the work on worker militias by Elizabeth Perry. However, her approach focuses on how worker militias built their citizenship and connected themselves with national politics in urban area. I take another angle by exploring the role of gun in the formation of individual and collective power. See Elizabeth Perry, *Patrolling the Revolution: Worker Militias, Citizenship, and the Modern Chinese State* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006).

Rather, they were closely connected with the state, especially when their holding of power constituted a potential threat to the state authority in the eyes of the government officials or political actors, who drew these armed individuals or groups into the political landscape, as the state sought to either regulate or mobilize them.

The Proliferation of Private Gun Ownership: A Nationwide Overview

The total number of guns owned by non-military individuals cannot be calculated with any precision. This is partly owing to the reality that a vigorous national program of gun registration was absent during late Qing and Republican periods. Though successive governments designated private weapons regulation policies including gun licensing and registration, these procedures were never effectively implemented. The difficulty in accurately estimating the amount of private guns also lies in the sheer diversity of Chinese people who owned guns. Gun ownership was more prevalent among violence-prone people, such as urban criminals and rural bandits, whose roving lifestyle also hindered their visibility. In the modern period, affluent urban dwellers and rural residents obtained guns for self-defense purposes. But a majority of them too left few historical traces.

As Edward McCord has shown, the formation of military power in Republican China was an uneven process, which depended on "the particular circumstances, or opportunities, in different areas."[11] In a similar vein, gun ownership was unevenly distributed in Republican China. In the province of Guangdong, for example, gun ownership was especially common, owing to the penetration of foreign guns from nearby Hong Kong and Macau. In some northern provinces, like Henan, where bandit raids were common, many local residents bore arms for self-

[11] McCord, *The Power of the Gun*, 11.

defense. As my research shows, bandits and outlaws were primary armed groups who armed themselves with modern guns. Civilians' action of pursuing guns partly stemmed from the social insecurity caused by frequent banditry and crime. When the regions suffered from deteriorating social disorder, people were more likely to acquire powerful weapons to defend themselves and their communities. Based on a number of social survey report, historian Phil Billingsley estimated the general distribution of banditry in modern China, which might be applicable to the distribution of privately-owned guns, as offense and defense were intertwined.[12]

[12] Phil Billingsley, *Bandits in Republican China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 28.

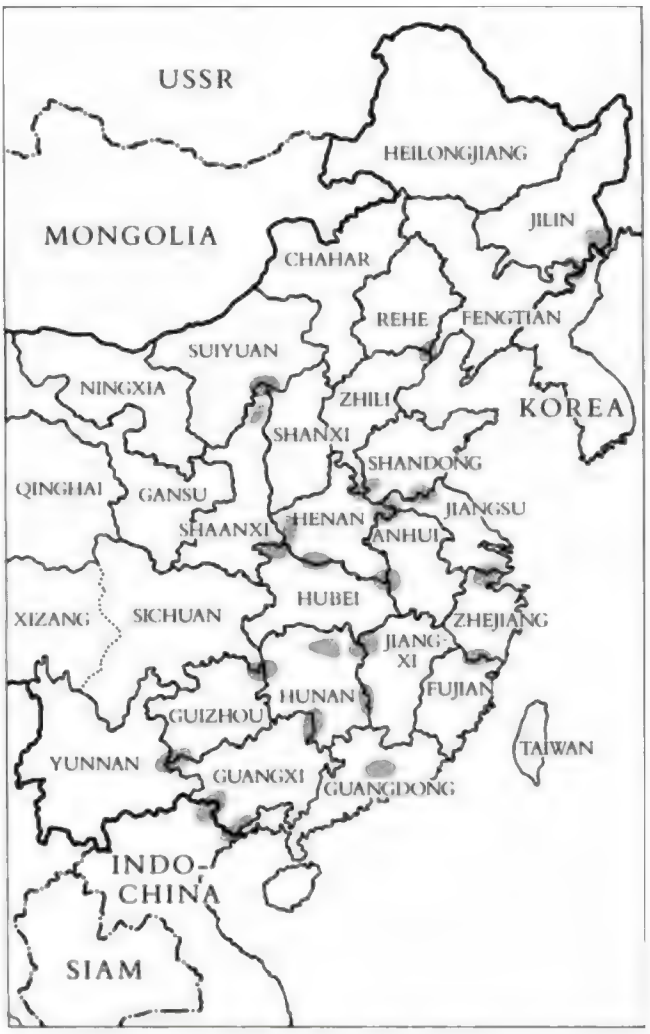

Figure 1: The distribution of bandits in Republican China. SOURCE: This map was adapted from Phil Billingsley, *Bandits in Republican China*, 32; Hsi-sheng Ch'i, *Warlord Politics in China, 1916-1928* (Stanford: Stanford University, 1976).

While difficult to estimate with any precision, based on social survey reports and criminal cases, it is possible to figure out major regions that possessed large number of guns. Modern Shanghai, for example, was one major point of entrance for foreign guns, which were held by gangsters, members of the urban middle-class, bandits, and others. Before the Chinese Communist Party's takeover in 1949, the Shanghai Municipal Police Department issued more than eight thousand gun licenses to the city's civilians, who legally owned a weapon for self-

defense.[13] Violent and ruthless acts committed by Shanghai gangsters who armed themselves largely with rapid-firing weapons like the semiautomatic Mauser, almost reached their peak. A crime statistic by the *North China Herald*, Shanghai's most influential foreign newspaper of the time, stated that the Shanghai Municipal Police (SMP) arrested more than 300 gangsters on charges of armed robbery and murder from 1919 to 1923.[14]

Private gun ownership was likely more prevalent in Guangdong province than in other Chinese provinces. After 1949, over 500,000 private guns were confiscated in Guangdong. People in the province had a long tradition of using firearms even before the modern gun was introduced in the late nineteenth century. Bird guns were commonly found in temple sacrifices, lineage feudings, and epidemic banditry. In the decades after the First Opium War (1838-1842), large amounts of firearms poured into Guangdong, mainly owing to its geographical proximity to Macau and Hong Kong, two Western colonies that provided access to foreign guns. One 1924 newspaper report estimated that non-military individuals or groups in the province owned as many as four million guns.[15]

Neighboring Guangxi province offered another focus for the prevalence of guns. Ethnic conflicts and frequent banditry spurred people's obsession with powerful weapons. As one local

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[13] Shanghaishi Gonganju Gongan Shizhi Bianzuanweiyuanhui 上海市公安局公安史志編纂委員會, *Shanghai Gonganzhi* 上海公安志 (Shanghai Police Gazetteer) (Shanghai: Shanghai shehui kexue chubanshe, 1997), 312; Shanghai Municipal Archives (SMA) Q131-22-164, 165, 168, 169, 170, 171.

[14] *North China Herald*, June 16, 1923. Gangsters' activities were addressed in Brian G. Martin's *The Shanghai Green Gang, Politics and Organized Crimes*, 1919-1937 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

[15] He Minhun 何民魂, "Zisha di Sunwen 自殺底孫文" (To kill Sun Yat-sen), *Huazi ribao* 華子日報, October 24, 1924.

Communist cadre recalled, wealthy families made efforts to buy powerful foreign weapons in the 1920s, whereas the poor could only afford inferior guns or collectively buy firearms. Not willing to join the military, local peasants obtained guns to defend themselves against potential attacks from bandits or their rival ethnic groups.[16] A newspaper article appeared in the *Nanjing Minguo ribao* in 1936 noted that "it was quite common for peasants to arm themselves with guns for self-protection when grazing livestock and farming."[17] Given Guangxi's proximity to Guangdong, Hong Kong, and French Indochina, guns of different types easily entered the province through the hands of smugglers and other intermediaries.

The number of privately owned guns in Henan province soared in the decades after the 1911 Revolution when the province suffered from constant warfare as Henan's central geographical position "made it the site of pitched battles."[18] As Phil Billingsley's research on Henan asserts, warlordism helped create a condition that contributed to "the consequent increase in banditry."[19] A conservative estimate in 1924 by sociologist He Xiya 何西亞 put the number of

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[16] For the distribution of firearms in Guangxi, see Xiaorong Han, *Red God: Wei Baqun and his Peasant Revolution in Southern China, 1894-1932* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014), 27-8.

[17] "Guangxi minqiang shengduo 廣西民槍勝多" (The prevalence of privately-held guns in Guangxi), *Nanning minguo ribao* 南寧民國日報, July 24, 1936.

[18] Micah S. Muscolino, *The Ecology of War in China, Henan Province, the Yellow River, and Beyond, 1938-1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 17. For the strategic importance of Henan, see Roger V. Des Forges, *Cultural Centrality and Political Changei in Chinese History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Xin Zhang, *Social Transformation in Modern China: The State and Local Elites in Henan, 1900-1937* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 25-8; Odoric Y.K. Wou, *Mobilizing the Masses: Building Revolution in Henan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 17.

[19] Henan Sheng Zhengfu Michuchu 河南省政府秘書處, *Wuniandai Henan Zhengzhi Zongbaogao* 五年來河南政治總報告 (Reports on the political situation of Henan in the past few years), N.P., 1936, 37.

bandits at more than 51,100 belonging to at least 6,000 gangs. From the 1920s on, rural militarization in Henan accelerated in response to weak central government, banditry, and military conflicts. Local elites and peasants sought guns for either self-defense or organizing militia forces. After the Nationalist government re-established its central authority in Henan in 1933, the provincial government then ordered privately-owned guns registered. According to government statistics, 232,400 guns or rifles were registered and engraved.[20] The prevalence of the privately-owned guns in Henan was partially a result of banditry. For instance, to defend against rapacious bandits, local elites in northern Henan forced the peasants to make contributions to purchase firearms.[21] However, at the same time, a social survey conducted by sociologist Wang Yike 王怡柯 found the real number of private guns was several times higher.[22] Wang's survey was echoed by local Communist cadres, who were active in the Province to mobilize the masses. It was reflected in the Communist document that almost all the middle peasants in Western Henan owned at least one gun.[23]

All of Manchuria, including today's Liaoning, Jilin, and Heilongjiang provinces, was another region that was known for the proliferation of guns in local society. The region transformed into a "bandit world" after the fall of the Qing dynasty as it underwent economic

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[20] Ibid.

[21] Wang Yike 王怡柯, *Nongcun Ziwei Yanjiu* 農村自衛研究 (Research on the Self-defense in Rural Society) (Kaifeng: Kaifeng jianhua yinshuju, 1932), 104.

[22] Xingzhengyuan Nongcun Fuxing Weiyuanhui 行政院農村復興委員會, *Henan sheng nongcun diaocha* 河南省農村調查 (Investigation of rural Henan province) (Shanghai: Shangwu chubanshe, 1934), 90.

[23] Henan Sheng Wenshi Ziliao Bianzuan Weiyuanhui 河南省文史資料編纂委員會, *Jiuzong zai Henan* 九縱在河南 (The ninth regiment in Henan) (Zhengzhou: Henan renmin chubanshe, 1986), 54.

and social dislocation. "Most peasant families had a gun, both to protect themselves from predators and to allow them to 'go bandit' themselves should the need arise."[24] It was quite common in Manchuria that wealthy landlords obtained guns to organize collective self-defense forces. The *Shengjing Shibao* reported in 1912 that one local gentryman of the suburb of Mukden owned 140 Russian guns, 72 Japanese guns, 13 Mauser rifles, and many other foreign weapons.[25] After Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931 and later established Manchukuo, the puppet state immediately registered civilians guns which were then confiscated. Jin Shiming 金名仕, a high ranking official in the puppet state, confessed after the Japanese surrender that he was ordered to confiscate approximately 290,000 guns from civilians in Jilin province in 1934.[26]

The Issues and Historiography

The Social and Cultural Life of Private Gun Ownership

A full understanding of the relationship between private gun ownership and state politics is not possible without explaining who carried guns and how. In considering the circulation of private firearms and their social meaning to Chinese civilians, this project first sets the private gun in its specific social and cultural context. This project suggests that "the gun issue" did not come to the front line of China's stormy history until the late nineteenth century. In the same essay cited above, Shen Congwen noted that most local militias continued to use swords, spears,

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[24] Phil Billingsley, *Bandits in Republican China*, 28.

[25] "Xiangfang junhuo zhi zhongzu 鄉防軍火之充足" (Weapons are sufficient among militia forces), *Shengjing shibao,* March 20, 1912.

[26] Hou Ming 侯明 ed. *Wei Manzhouguo de Tongzhi yu Neimu: Weiman Guangyuan Gongshu* 偽滿洲國的統治與內幕: 偽滿官員供述 (The confessions of former officials in the puppet Manchukuo) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000), 182.

and traditional Chinese bird guns (*niaoqiang*) through the 1900s.[27] Shen's observation matched that of T.R. Jernigan's 1908 travel account, which claimed firearms with gunpowder were seldom used in China's interior regions, even though China invented the firearm in the early thirteenth century.[28]

Private weapons were available from a variety of sources in the Republican period, and those sources changed over time. Starting in the early 20th century, China was inexorably drawn into a whirlwind of global economic, technological, and political changes, accelerating the diffusion of personal weapons nationwide. Faced with slumping domestic markets for military arms, many Western arms producers turned to China, with its vast population and mounting civil insecurity, as a potential new market. Sales representatives from Remington, Colt, Winchester, and many other companies came to China in large numbers to dispose of their surplus arms following the end of the American Civil War, World War I, and Russian Revolution. Many accounts of the time show that Chinese civilians came to prefer these foreign-made guns for their greater accuracy, penetration, and operability. The invention of the self-loading semi-automatic gun in 1902 made the foreign gun even easier for non-military people to operate. For example, the Colt's Manufacturing Company's business records show that by the late 1940s, its Colt M1903, a self-loading gun designed by John Moses Browning, sold astoundingly well in China.[29]

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[27] Shen, *Xin yu jiu*, 123.

[28] Thomas R. Jernigan, *Shooting in China* (Shanghai: Methodist Publishing House, 1908), 205-10.

[29] Colt Collection, Connecticut State Library.

The inclination towards foreign guns was inextricably intertwined with trends in consumption. As China historians Sherman Cochran and Frank Dikötter remind us, "foreign" always denoted "modern" and "superior" and signaled elevated social status. China's huge domestic market and its escalating demand spurred the emergence of gun merchants, who served as intermediaries between arms manufacturers and Chinese customers. Henry Brewer, a sales representative for the Winchester Arms Company, stayed in China from the 1890s to the 1920s. His diary, housed at the Yale University Archives, shows that many foreign trading companies in the treaty ports, like Canton and Shanghai, not only functioned as importers by providing Chinese officials the weapons they needed to fight rebels or defend themselves, but also played pivotal roles in circulating foreign guns among civilians.[30] As bi-cultural intermediaries, these comprador-merchants, who were familiar with the China market, greatly facilitated the actual gun transactions. Fully utilizing their expertize in foreign firearms and adept at marketing through modern advertizing in newspapers and periodicals, these middlemen became sole licensed agents for urban dwellers to obtain this fashionable new product.

While legal trading companies offered civilians the latest guns at exorbitant prices, a huge number of surplus or outmoded weapons from arms-producing states or armed conflict prone regions flowed into China through illicit arms trafficking. Meanwhile, with the introduction of foreign guns, early twentieth-century Chinese local society saw dramatic changes in the technology of manufacturing guns. Once these foreign guns arrived in China, local craftsmen learned to pirate their advanced design, and manufactured innumerable poor and inexpensive copies. For example, Nanyang, a city of southwestern Henan Province, had hundreds of small workshops operated by local gentry that imitated guns of foreign design and

[30] William Henry Brewer Papers, Yale University Archives.

distributed them to local people. Lastly, the intermittent civil warfare during the Republican period facilitated the civilians' easy access to weapons. Some local newspaper accounts show that, after doing battle, soldiers simply abandoned their weapons on the battlefield, which were then picked up by local people. These scattered firearms, known to local people as "leftover guns," were gathered together in many cases to support the formation of militia forces. The firearm suppliers, foreign gun smugglers, Chinese criminal organizations, and corrupt officials saw the profitability of gun sales. A vast gun distribution network formed gradually, resulting in the prevalence of guns not only in China's coastal areas but also in the interior.

Gun Ownership and Power Structure in Local Society

Chinese acquired small arms for a variety of reasons, including self-protection against armed bandits, elevating social status, and seizing local power. To analyze Chinese civilians' motives for owning guns, this study draws inspiration from anthropologist Arjun Appadurai's assertion that "commodities, like persons, have social lives," and "their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories." As he writes, "it is only through the analysis of these trajectories that we can interpret the human transactions and calculations that enliven things."[31] Thus, the social significance of guns varies in both actual times and social spaces, as Chinese people of different classes might assign their weapons different symbolic values.

Influenced by Confucian values, Chinese traditional culture regarded lethal weapons as implements of evil design. In the 1930s, the eminent historian Lei Haizong labeled Chinese

[31] Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective,* ed. Arjun Appadurai (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 3.

culture a "demilitarized" culture (無兵文化 *wu bing wenhua*), in which the military side of society was devalued, therefore sapping Chinese civilians' ability to fight. Chinese civilians had very limited access to life-taking weapons, except during periods of rebellions.[32] However, the view of weaponry had changed in the republican period when the social turmoil created by predatory warlordism, foreign invasion, and the proliferation of armed banditry forced Chinese civilians to arm themselves for self-defense. Offenders with lethal intentions often resorted to guns when committing violent crimes. The social insecurity that resulted from frequent gun violence led to an arms race of sorts, incentivizing other Chinese to purchase ever more powerful guns, or replace their traditional Chinese weapons with potent foreign guns. Moreover, in the context of social insecurity, state officials and intellectuals had already been pondering how to mobilize civilians against potential enemies in local society. Sun Yat-sen, first president of the Republic of China, and his fellow reformers emphasized people's right of self-defense, which would help the government fight against rebels and bandits. As a political tool to expel rebels and maintain order, the idea of self-defense suggested that the right to use violence was sanctioned if necessary.

This sanctioned violence led to a startlingly high level of private gun ownership, which brought about tremendous and unexpected social consequences. In rural areas, the process of what Prasenjit Duara calls "state involution" in the late Qing and throughout the Republican era gave rise to regional predatory powers, which were freed from central constraints and controls.[33]

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[32] Lei Haizong 雷海宗, *Zhongguo Wenhua yu Zhongguo de Bing* 中國文化與中國的兵 (Chinese culture and the Chinese military) (Changsha: Shangwu chubanshe, 1940), 51.

[33] Prasenjit Duara, *Culture, Power, and the State: Rural North China, 1900-1942* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988).

Over the course of political fragmentation and in response to the increasingly widespread armed banditry, this period witnessed pervasive local militarization as a form of collective self-defense. This process has been carefully examined by Philip Kuhn.[34] Nevertheless, relatively few studies have been done on how ambitious individuals and their followers wielded guns and transformed local power structures. This new phenomenon was manifest in early 20th century Guangdong, which shows that militarized mobilization in rural society generated new forms of social power and domination, in which the use of guns played an increasingly decisive role. During the warlord era (1916-1928), some ambitious individuals in Canton, who were eager to improve their military prominence in local society, sought to acquire guns to establish their own Merchants' Corps. Consequently, local elites in many regions, who had managed local affairs in the Qing dynasty, either obtained powerful guns to retain their dominance, or gave way to the newly emerging martial elite.

Private Guns, National Politics: Regulating Gun Ownership in Wartime China

Widespread and largely unregulated private gun ownership also exerted appreciable effects in the national political arena. Max Weber defined the modern state as a "compulsory organization with a territorial basis" which "successfully upholds the claim to the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force in the enactment of its order." [35] Nevertheless, civilian possession of guns not only endangered public security, but also helped subvert central and local government authority over local areas, affecting the power relationship between the state and

[34] Kuhn, *Rebellion and Its Enemies in Late Imperial China.*

[35] Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, eds., *Max Weber, Economy and Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 54, 56.

commoners. In a state of what Joel Migdal called "strong societies and weak states," the Nationalist government had to face the failure of its bureaucratic penetration into local society.[36]

In the city of Canton, for example, the government was wary of civilian gun ownership, which it took to be a challenge to its authority. In the early 1910s, amidst tremendous social instability, merchants in Canton created the Merchant Volunteers Corps for self-defense. In August 1924, when Sun Yet-sen, then president of the Guangdong Revolutionary government noticed in August 1924 that the merchants had purchased a large number of guns from Europe, he ordered the guns confiscated. After the merchants' carried out a two-month protest and strike, Sun ordered his army to suppress the Corps, leading to the death of thousands of people. After the incident, the KMT government enacted various mechanisms to restrict private gun ownership.

Various mechanisms then had been enacted or proposed by governments to regulate the foreign gun's circulation. The Qing Code and many criminal cases of the late Qing confirm that carrying of firearms by civilians was prohibited and that the penalty for violation was severe. In the Republican period, the Nationalist government, on the one hand, allowed those people it defined as "good civilians," or *liangmin* to own guns to guarantee their rights of self-defense. The Nationalists also worked to reduce firearm smuggling and implemented a national policy of gun licensing to ensure the compliance of gun owners. On the other hand, the Nationalists merged control of gun ownership with the *baojia* system, an administrative mechanism for local control and surveillance. However, the number of guns in private hands increased rather than decreased. These gun regulation efforts failed when regional power blocs undercut the central

[36] Joel S. Mingdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 269.

power. In wartime, the government even ceased scrutinizing unregistered gun ownership for fear that restrictive control might provoke illegal gun owners to insurrection, as demonstrated in the 1938 incident described below.

In March 1938, Chen Cheng (陳誠1897-1965), a senior general in the Nationalist Chinese military, wrote to Chiang Kai-shek, expressing his deep concern over the popular movements in southwestern Shandong province. The confiscation of civilian-owned guns in Shandong, Chen argued, did more to provoke peasants' anti-government outrage than any socioeconomic cause. Chen attributed the peasant unrest to the policy of confiscating guns adopted by Han Fuju, the military governor of Shandong, who had been executed two months previously for disobeying central government orders. Starting in the early1930s, Han took the advice of Liang Shuming, a leading figure of the rural reconstruction movement, to collect private guns, which were then distributed to militia for collective self-defense. However, local residents were skeptical about the policy, fearing that they would lose their means of self-defense. To avoid escalating tension, Chiang quickly ordered Shandong authorities to return the guns and required them not to register any private weapons.[37]

In contrast, the lax gun regulations offered the CCP an opportunity to increase its military strength when it established revolutionary base areas in Shandong. The CCP internal documents show that its successful mobilization of armed civilians played an important role in enlarging its influence in North China. The CCP took another position and emphasized the strategic significance of armed civilians in sustaining its revolutionary enterprize. As the 1938

[37] Chen Cheng, *Chen Cheng Xiansheng Shuxinji: yu Jiang Zhongzheng Xiansheng Wanglai Handian* 陳誠先生書信集:與蔣中正先生往來函電 (Letters of Chen Cheng to Chiang Kai-shek), vol. 1 (Taipei: Academia Historica, 2007), 302.

incident in Shandong suggests, the CCP quickly exploited the potential military power of civilian gun holders. Another case in Henan province indicates that the number of peasants owning guns even determined where the CCP would choose to locate their revolutionary bases. In 1941, Wei Gongzhi (危拱之 1905-1973), a local communist cadre in Henan province, observed that "almost each county in West and South Henan had more than 10,000 guns in the hands of civilians."[38] The general prevalence of private guns, resulting partially from lax government regulations, offered the CCP an opportunity to increase its military strength when the CCP established its revolutionary base areas in this region. The CCP's gun ownership policy fit into its general ideology of mass line policies. In seeking to mobilize these armed civilians, the CCP prevented them from registering their guns with the local Nationalist government. Local Communist cadres either organized the armed civilians into guerrilla units or confiscated private guns for their military use. As chapter five will present, Communist cadres in northern China adopted the theory of class struggle when dealing with the armed civilians in rural society. Mobilizing the armed peasants was the first priority, who were then organized to force local elite or strongmen to surrender their weapons. The mobilization of armed civilians in rural society played an important role in strengthening its military power from 1937 to 1945.

Private gun ownership in the Republican period indicated a significant degree of power devolution. Studying this phenomenon allows me to re-evaluate the dynamic interaction between state and society. Previous studies in this field have either focused on elite mobility or have scrutinized the organized form of elite activism in local society. Scholars like Mary Rankin,

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[38] Wei Gongzhi, "Guanyu Yunan Wuzhuang Gongzuo Buchong Baogao 關於豫南武裝工作補充報告" (Supplementary report on the arming of the people in southern Henan Province), in *Kangzhan Shiqi de Henan Shengwei* 抗戰時期的河南省委 (Henan Provincial Committee of the CCP in the Second Sino-Japanese War), vol. 1 (Zhengzhou: Henan renmin chubanshe, 1986), 88.

William Rowe, and David Strand have suggested that elites, through their extrabureaucratic activities, filled the power vacuum in society.[39] A recent approach has been to study the process of state making. As Philip Kuhn, Prasenjit Duara, Xiaoqun Xu describe, in the shadow of "state involution," the state's efforts were jeopardized by local elites.[40] Rather than discretely exploring elite activism and the state's endeavors, my study takes these elements in a historical synthesis to probe how private gun ownership complicated local society, impeding the practice of state power.

As noted above, while the Nationalist government failed to implement a mechanism to regulate private gun ownership, the CCP quickly realized armed civilians' potential power in the base areas. The CCP's organizational achievement in rural China has been understood by historians either as a hegemonizing process or as popular participation based on democratic principles. The central question of the previous scholarship on the CCP movement in rural China is "What are the strategies and policies that make peasants revolutionary?" Chalmers Johnson, for example, attributed the successful rural mobilization to the rise of mass nationalism. According to Johnson, the Japanese invasion deepened peasants' national consciousness. The political vacuum made peasants rely on the CCP, which provided the leadership resisting the

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[39] R. Keith Schoppa, *Chinese Elites and Political Change: Zhejiang Province in the Early Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982); Mary Rankin, *Elite Activism and Political Transformation in China: Zhejiang Province, 1965-1911* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986); William Rowe *Hankow: Commerce and Society in a Chinese City* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984); and David Strand, *Rickshaw Beijing: City People and Politics in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

[40] Duara, *Culture, Power, and the State*; Xiaoqun Xu, *Trial of Modernity: Judicial Reform in Early Twentieth-Century China, 1901-1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008); Julia Strauss, *Strong Institutions in Weak Polities: State Building in Republican China, 1927-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

Japanese Army.[41] Mark Selden, on the other hand, criticizes that Johnson over emphasizes the CCP's nationalistic character. He argues that economic motives and the CCP's mass line policies played inevitable roles in strengthening the Party's power in Shaanxi.[42] Other scholars like Ralph Thaxton highlights the role of Chinese peasants who themselves possessed revolutionary passion, which was embedded in folk culture. According to Thaxton, it was the Chinese communists who guided the peasants to the revolutionary course.[43] However, these scholarly works give little attention to the actual process of popular mobilization under the CCP's organization initiatives in a highly militarized society.[44] This research departs from the above two approaches that polarize statism and populism. Instead, through probing the CCP's policy towards armed civilians in base areas, I argue that the two paradigms were not mutually exclusive. The findings of this project thus make a crucial contribution to the ongoing debate about how the CCP built its grassroots organization, leading to its victory in 1949.

Sources

The scattered nature of source materials was one of the principal challenges for completing this dissertation project. A research project on private gun ownership requires an

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[41] Chalmers A. Johnson. *Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power: The Emergence of Revolutionary China, 1937-1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962).

[42] Mark Selden, *The Yenan Way in Revolutionary China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971).

[43] Ralph Thaxton, *China Turned Rightside Up: Revolutionary Legitimacy in the Peasant World* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1983).

[44] The classic work highlighting the people's voluntary participation is Mark Selden's *The Yenan Way in Revolutionary China*. Tetsuya Kataoka and Yung-fa Chen reject this view by arguing that the CCP had totalitarian ambitions to mobilize the peasants. See Yung-fa Chen, *Making Revolution: The Communist Movement in Eastern and Central China, 1937-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Tetsuya Kataoka, *Resistance and Revolution: The Communists and the Second United Front* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).

investigation of why Chinese people chose to arm themselves with certain types of guns, how they obtained these weapons, and the sociopolitical responses generated from the prevalence of private-owned guns. However, no particular set of primary documents is available to answer each single question, especially given the clandestine nature of many types of gun circulations, and because anonymous gun owners left very few traces behind.

To overcome the barrier, the dissertation relies heavily on the documents produced by witnesses and regulators. It uses three kinds of sources: print materials, archival documents, and artifacts of material culture. The apparent regional variations, particularly between the urban and rural areas, between the north and the south, and between coastal and inland areas, have to be obtained through consulting a large range of textual materials. The sociocultural changes associated with private gun ownership are documented in a bounty of materials which have survived in the archives of governments and private agencies, but have largely been ignored by scholars. The legal records and smuggling documents, though scattered in various Chinese archives and newspaper reports, provide uneven documentation of intraregional foreign gun circulation. While the clandestine nature of many firearm transactions in Chinese society makes it difficult to fully understand the patterns of circulation, this project also refers to the statistical evidence from the firearm suppliers' side. For example, I obtained business documents of the Colt Patent Firearms Manufacturing Company in the Connecticut state archives, containing primary sources encompassing the marketing strategies gun manufacturers used for approaching the Chinese market.

Because the late Qing and Republican governments crafted laws that prevented civilians from owning concealed guns and conducted meticulous gun registration, an equally indispensable source is the nearly complete registration records preserved in Beijing and

Shanghai police archives. These records provide detailed documentation of legal urban gun owners' personal backgrounds and include foreign gun's models and maintenance records, supplying important information about urban dwellers' motivations and penchants for foreign guns. This project also makes use of material culture, visual evidence, literature, and pictorials to explore the foreign gun's cultural implications. The images of foreign guns appeared in many literary works. Since a majority of the Chinese population was illiterate, visual evidence, such as images in pictorials, caricature, and advertisements, is useful to illustrate the symbolism of guns.

The published legal documents of both late Qing and Republican China are useful sources to study governments' policies to regulate gun circulation and usage. However, the crimes reported in newspapers, government statistics, and officials' personal memoirs are crucial to understanding the complexity of implementing gun control policies. In studying the relationship between private gun ownership and national politics, the bulk of evidence is drawn from archives in both mainland China and Taiwan. Of extreme importance are the records of CCP internal documents scattered in provincial archives that I have visited in Shandong and Henan, telling primarily the story of how the CCP in north China mobilized armed peasants, by either organizing them into guerrilla resistance, or confiscating guns for its revolutionary agenda. In addition to revolutionary documents preserved in archives, numerous memoirs from veteran soldiers convey vivid details about the CCP's endeavor to consolidate rural base areas and guerrilla districts, and the strategies they crafted to ally with armed rural dwellers. Similarly, another important source is the military documents preserved in the Academia Historica and the Bureau of Military History and Translation in Taipei, which include detailed military logs and commands, supplying altogether vital information about the KMT's policy of arming the general

population. These military sources are essential for comparing the actions and policies of the CCP and the KMT toward armed civilians that might help generate different political outcomes.

Chapter Overview

This dissertation is organized both chronologically and thematically. The thematic approach allows me to examine different implications that the issue of private gun ownership generated. The chronological organization provides a comprehensive investigation of the influences of privately-owned guns over time and space. The dissertation follows the foreign gun's journey in China from a tool people chose to bear to a symbol of a threat government attempted to regulate. The first section contains chapter one explaining why some Chinese people embraced guns and how these guns got diffused in local society. The second section, composed of chapter two through chapter five, concentrates on how different political entities regulated and even controlled civilian possession of firearms from the late nineteenth century to 1949. As I will present in the following chapters, an investigation of gun control policies adopted by the governments of late Qing, early Republic, Nationalist, and the Communist's border region offers an opportunity to detect the continuity and discontinuity of the strategies pursued by political entities to approach their relationship with local society.

Chapter one sets the gun in a social and cultural context and considers the social meaning of the gun to Chinese civilians. It suggests that guns lived colorful social lives and exhibited themselves as tools of violence, labels of social status, and symbols of self-empowerment. Many of these symbols, coexisted and converged, which is evident of just how integral they were to the social life of modern China. After discussing the multifaceted manifestations of the gun in social life, this chapter goes further and examines the channels that facilitated the gun's diffusion.

As detailed in chapter two, the Chinese state's inability to maintain its monopoly on violence started from the late nineteenth century, when China suffered from both domestic rebellions and external invasions. It suggests that the phenomenon of private gun ownership became a political issue from this period. To address the problem, the late Qing government was to adjust to the new social and political reality. The state's regulation and control over its armed civilians appeared as a dynamic process, hovering between two ideologies. First, the state sought to maintain its monopoly on the most advanced weapons. Second, armed civilians were regarded as an extension of state power. The state thus exercised a permissive policy towards private gun ownership. The legacy of this policy, I argue, was felt in the Republican period.

The late Qing's gun policy that mobilized the armed civilians to defend localities did not achieve its end, but led to the state's loss of its monopoly on violence. Revolutionary events throughout China were spiraling out of control, which ultimately toppled the Qing dynasty. In chronological order, chapter three then examines how the government of the early Republican period tried to maximize its control over localities and the setbacks it encountered. To provide an in-depth analysis of the dynamic relations between state and society, this chapter mainly focuses on Guangdong, from which Sun Yat-sen's nationalist revolution was initiated to defeat northern warlords in China. As discussed above, privately-owned guns were more prevalent in Guangdong than in other Chinese provinces. When Sun Yat-sen made Guangdong province the base of its revolutionary initiatives, he was obliged to adopt a collaborative stance with gun owners. Their relationship was irreconcilable and mutually suspicious, which led to the 1924 Canton Merchants' Corps Incident. Dwelling on local newspapers, revolutionary documents, and witness accounts, this chapter proves the overall thesis that the government policy towards private gun ownership was contingent and dynamic. The collaboration and conflict between Sun

Yat-sen's government and social forces in Guangdong, the Canton Merchants' Corps in particular, suggested that the early Republican government frowned on private armed forces lest they threaten the government's monopoly on power. This chapter enriches our understanding of the complexities of revolutionary agenda and local reality during the early Republic.

Chapter four is devoted to the Nationalist period (1928-1949). The Nationalist government realized that civilian possession of guns subverted their authority over local areas, affecting the power relationship between the state and commoners. Following the legacy of late Qing and early Republican government, the Nationalist government adopted a regulatory approach to ensure the gun was in the hands of good civilians. Specifically, the Nationalists worked to reduce firearm smuggling and implemented a national policy of gun licensing to ensure the compliance of gun owners. However, these gun regulations proved ineffective as regional power blocs undercut the central power.

To make a comparison of gun policies adopted by different government entities, the final chapter centers on the mobilization efforts of the Communists from the late 1930s, who saw the mobilization of an armed populace as an opportunity to strengthen the CCP's military and political presence in North China. This chapter examines different strategies and tactics that the CCP used to mobilize the armed peasants and landlords, and suggests how the CCP appreciated the strategic significance of armed civilians in sustaining its revolutionary cause.

The short epilogue and conclusion chapter briefly examines how the Communist Government in the early 1950s launched a movement throughout China to disarm the civilians. Rather than taking advantage of the armed populace as the CCP did before the Communist regime was established, this gun confiscation movement in the early 1950s echoed the overall thesis that the state's stance towards private gun ownership was contingent and inconsistent,

which was determined by political deliberation. This chapter then discusses the issue of private gun ownership in contemporary China. A unified China under one-Party rule today guarantees the maximum effectiveness of the gun control policy.

~ CHAPTER ONE~

The Prism of Violence:

The Social and Cultural Life of Gun in Modern China

Introduction

In the late 1920s, Shanghai, China's leading treaty port and international metropolis, was a bustling hub teeming with novelty, wealth, cultural diversity, and, of course, terrible crime.[1] This modern city, nurtured since the late nineteenth century by the frequent exchange of people, ideas, and commodities from, was now swollen with nearly three million people of various nationalities, races, and social classes.[2] Like their counterparts in other countries, foreigners in Shanghai brought with them their customs, cultures, and objects, all of which helped make the city cosmopolitan, as was evident in its the diverse and colorful urban life. Among these exotic objects, some foreigners who themselves were competent marksmen (or women) also brought a lust for the use of modern guns to the Shanghai people, who needed them for self-defense or were simply fascinated by them. This is evidenced by some local Chinese people's active participation in the revolver shooting club in the foreign concession areas. In May 1928, the Shanghai Revolving Association held a shooting competition in which Mrs. Li Junseng 李駿僧,

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[1] For the transformation of modern Shanghai, see Leo Ou-Fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999); Hanchao Lu, *Beyond the Neon Lights: Everyday Shanghai in the Early Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); For the urban crime in Shanghai, see Frederic Wakeman, *Policing Shanghai, 1927-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Wakeman, The Shanghai Badlands: Wartime Terrorism and Urban Crime, 1937-1941 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[2] For the urban population of Shanghai, see Lu, *Beyond the Neon Lights*, 26-27.

a wealthy lady from an illustrious family won the championship.[3] Three months later, her husband outshone all other shooting enthusiasts in another competition organized by the Shanghai International Pistol Shooting Association.[4]

However, the better-off residents' use of firearms does not present the complete picture of the foreign weapon's ubiquitous presence in a modernizing urban society. The introduction of foreign guns also bred social problems such as armed crime and gun running. By this time Shanghai crime rates had soared, and the city had gained its reputation as "the crime center of the Orient."[5] American journalist Percival Finch, who had traveled extensively in China during the Republican period, attributed the city's poor public security to the ready availability of foreign guns to criminals.[6] Shanghai newspapers of the time were filled with stories on criminal cases of shootings and armed robberies in which foreign-made guns figured prominently. Violent and ruthless acts committed by Shanghai gangsters who armed themselves largely with rapid-firing weapons such as the semiautomatic Mauser, had almost reached their peak.[7] Witnessing the

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[3] "Shanghai shouqiang zonghui wuyue jingsai diyiming Li Junseng furen" (上海手槍總會五月競賽第一名李駿僧夫人, Mrs. Li Junseng won the championship in the May shooting competition held by the Shanghai Revolving Association), *Guohua shibao* 國畫時報, May 28, 1928.

[4] "Li Junseng jun benyue shanghai wanguo shouqiang jingsai hui rongyu jiangzhang" (李駿僧君本月得上海萬國手槍競賽會榮譽獎章), *Guohua shibao*, August 28, 1928.

[5] Percival Finch, "The Crime Situation in the International Settlement," *The China Weekly Review*, October 27, 1928.

[6] Finch, "Gun-Running an Organized Business in Shanghai," *The China Weekly Review*, July 3, 1926.

[7] Frederic Wakeman, Jr., *Policing Shanghai, 1927-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 7.

prevalence of gun violence, Finch did not exaggerate when he claimed that "armed crime is one of the most difficult problems facing the Municipal Police."[8]

How the wealthy Chinese like the Li Junseng family and unscrupulous armed criminals obtained their foreign weapons cannot be documented with any precision. However, as modern Shanghai experienced increasing interactions with the outside world, many Chinese in Shanghai would have had ample occasions to encounter this modern weapon and its uses. Well-off Chinese in search of comfort and security normally chose to reside in the International Settlement or the adjacent French Concession, where they would find no difficulty in buying modern guns in foreign trading companies as long as they obtained permission from the foreign-run municipal police in Shanghai. However, these trading companies, whose clients were largely foreigners, were not the only entry channels. Gun running, a lucrative and organized business, was fairly prevalent in 1920s Shanghai, and provided a means through which foreign weapons found their ways to local gangsters, criminals, and even ordinary residents. For example, as Finch marveled in his 1926 report, a first-class Mauser automatic, could be sold for at least four times its original selling price in Hamburg, Germany. The huge profit margins generated from such an enormous price discrepancy constituted an important incentive to organized gun-runners and smugglers. "A huge trade in gun-running," Finch wrote, "has developed between dealers in Shanghai and dealers in European countries, who are able to buy easily and cheaply from the manufacturers." As he spelled out in the report, many illegal foreign arms entering Shanghai were "brought in small batches by sailors," who, serving as traffickers, delivered their clients the arms they required from foreign suppliers.[9]

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[8] Finch, "Gun-Running an Organized Business in Shanghai."

[9] Ibid.

The incidents of Chinese men and women's uses of guns, regardless of their actual intentions, frequently appeared in local newspapers and criminal reports of the time. However scattered and unconnected, these cases suggest new elements that characterize some aspects of Chinese social and cultural life during the early twentieth-century. To the Shanghai residents during this period, these newspaper accounts represented at least three different images of the gun and its uses. First, the image of the delicate foreign gun was perceived as a symbol of social status and modernity. Immediately after the 1928 shooting contest, Mrs. Li's portrait appeared in the influential pictorial magazine *Guohua shibao* 國畫時報, in which she was holding a beautiful Colt pistol, wearing Cheongsam (*qipao*) dress 旗袍, and having a fashionable hairstyle. All these material objects and appearance, as China historians Leo Ou-fan Lee and Henrietta Harrison argue, embodied an advancing modernity.[10] Second, the frequency of armed robbery, abduction, and homicide made Shanghai residents associate guns with violence, crime and danger.[11] Third, in the face of frequent urban crime, carrying either a foreign gun or Chinese gun was seen as most immediate means of defense against potential threats.

[10] See Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999); Henrietta Harrison, *Republican Citizen: Political Ceremonies and Symbols in China, 1911-1929* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 179.

[11] Finch, "The Crime Situation in the International Settlement."

Figure 2: Mrs. Li Junseng won the shooting competition (1928). SOURCE: *Guohua shibao* 國畫時報, May 28, 1928.

Nevertheless, the multifunction of the gun was far from unique to this cosmopolitan city. From the late nineteenth-century onward, the numbers of privately-owned guns increasingly soared throughout China. The social status of private gun owners was varied in terms of their class, gender, and occupation. For example, one social investigation of the 1930s suggested that most big landlords in Henan and Hebei provinces owned at least tens of guns to both maintain

their dominance over local communities and to protect their properties.[12] In both provinces, gangsters and bandits endeavored to acquire ample guns to commit crime and banditry. In the late 1930s when China suffered from Japanese invasion, the image of the gun appeared in many literary works, which illustrated the action of arming oneself as showing Chinese people's resolution to fight for the country.

Thus, guns lived in a colorful social life and exhibited itself as tools of violence, labels of social status, and symbols of self-empowerment. It played a larger role as traditionally supposed in the theatre of modern China. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the social and cultural life of gun from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. It tends to answer the questions like why the gun became socially acceptable in modern China, what roles the gun played in social life, and how it made itself accessible. As it turned out, many types of the symbolism of the gun, including violence, modernity, and self-protection, coexisted and converged, which was integral to the social life of modern China. Based on a variety of sources, including newspaper reports and archival documents, this chapter starts with how the demands for guns were generated by people with different needs, and then discusses the image of the gun in public culture and social discourse. Finally, this chapter examines various channels through which the guns got diffused in both coastal and interior areas.

The Traditional Image of the Gun: Violence and Crime

In his seminal work on the role of violence in Chinese history, anthropologist Steven Harrell argues that Chinese culture, in contrast to many other cultures, condemns violence and "plays

[12] See Zheng Qidong 鄭起東, *Zhuanxingqi de Huabei Nongcun Shehui* 轉型期的華北農村社會 (Transformation of rural society of Huabei) (Shanghai: Zhongguo shudian, 2004), 133.

down the glory of military exploits, awards its prestige to literary, rather than martial, figures, and seeks harmony over all other values."[13] Nevertheless, in the social and cultural trajectory of late imperial and modern China, against which traditional literati claimed Chinese culture as pacifistic and demilitarized, violent actions assumed a much more visible role in social life. Violent conflict was endemic in many regions, which, according to Harrell, can be classified into two kinds: vertical violence ("dominance by one group over another"), and horizontal violence ("disputes between equals).[14] Both kinds of violence existed in a variety of ways, such as class conflicts, lineage feudings, class conflicts, rebels, banditry, and many others. Chinese elite culture, according to William Rowe, holds contempt for the violent behaviors.[15] Negative lexical items in the Chinese language including *fei* 匪, *zei* 賊, or *dao* 盜 are used to describe bandits, rebels, or robbers, whose behaviors should not "exist in the eyes of good society."[16]

A violence-prone person would use any tools to commit violence, but from the late nineteenth century on, evidence from many sources suggest that modern gun either imported abroad or produced in Chinese new arsenals were the preferred weapons in many criminal cases. When the foreign gun was introduced into China in the late nineteenth century, its usage in crime, banditry, and other conflict behaviors reinforced its symbolism of violence. Thus, how do we understand the relationship between the circulation of foreign guns and the frequency of

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[13] Steven Harrell, "Introduction," in *Violence in China, Essays in Culture and Counterculture*, eds., Jonathan Lipman and Stevan Harrell (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 1.

[14] Ibid., 2.

[15] William Rowe, *Crimson Rain: Seven Centuries of Violence in a Chinese County* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 4.

[16] Jean Chesneaux, *Peasant Revolts in China, 1840-1949* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1973), 9.

banditry or crime in modern China? Based on the computer-aided analysis, Chinese legal scholar Michael Ng suggests that crime was overwhelmingly concentrated in major treaty ports and modern cities, which witnessed dramatic social and economic transformation owing to the rapid modernization.[17] In the early twentieth century, shooting incidents commonly reported in local newspapers, mainly in major modern cities. These incidents were not isolated and had continued sporadically to be automatic response of social insecurity in many major Chinese cities like Beiping, Tianjin, and Shanghai during the Republican period. Sidney D. Gamble (1890-1968), a renowned sociologist who travelled in China between 1917 and 1932 to collect social-economic data, investigated that the violent crime rates grew rapidly for most of the period in Beiping.[18] Gamble's survey of Beiping's urban crime was echoed by Chinese leading criminologist and Professor at Yenching University Yan Jingyue (嚴景躍 1905-1976), whose empirical study on the crime in the 1920s also confirmed the trend, particularly the rise of homicide rates.[19] Because the gun-involved incidents were not tallied separately in the official crime statistics, it is difficult to perceive the role of private-held firearms in committing crime or homicide from Gamble and Yan's crime data supplied by the police agency of Beijing.[20]

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[17] Michael Hoi Kit Ng, "The Ordering of Crime in Republican Beijing from the 1910s to the 1930s," in *New Narratives of Urban Space in Republican Chinese Cities: Emerging Social, Legal and Governance Orders*, ed. Billy K. L. So and Madeleine Zelin (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 113-134. For the connection between crime and modernity, see Børge Bakken, "Introduction: Crime, Control, and Modernity in China," in *Crime, Punishment, and Policing in China*, ed. Børge Bakken (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005), 1-26.

[18] Sidney D. Gamble, *Peking: A Social Survey* (New York: George H. Doran, 1921), 80-86.

[19] Yan Jingyue, "Beijing fanzui zhi shehui fenxi 北京犯罪之社會分析" (A social analysis of crime in Beijing), *Shehui xuejie* 社會科學, no.2 (June 1928): 38-42.

[20] Both the Beiyang and the Nationalist governments followed the criminal codes adopted by the Late Qing. The criminal codes enumerated thirty-five types of crimes. See Michael Hoi Kit Ng, "The Ordering of Crime in Republican Beijing from the 1910s to the 1930s," 116.

And yet, other contemporary sources such as newspaper reports and criminal cases suggested the illegal use of guns was the major perceived reason driving the rise of homicide rates. For example, commenting on the poor public security of Beijing, a reporter stated in a *Dagong bao* 大公報 editorial that "gun robbery was a fairly common occurrence."[21] In another influential field study of crime in relation to social change in China, Yan Jingyue claimed that the means of committing crime had been vastly modernized with the introduction of rifle or pistol.[22]

The penetration of foreign guns into China's territories was also observed by many reporters and social survey practitioners.[23] In his 1920s interview with a bandit in Manchuria, Yan Jingyue was astonished to learn of the easy availability of gun among bandits. According to one bandit named Liu T.C., they managed to purchase guns from a Japanese pharmacy store in Shenyan 瀋陽 (Mukden) clandestinely. The owner of the store concealed a rifle, pistol, as well as bullets at the bottom of a dry well. Liu later found that "almost all the stores operated by Japanese engaged in arms and drug dealings."[24] The availability of foreign-made firearms and ammunition was also noted by foreign visitors. One of them was Dr. Harvey Howard, a missionary and professor of Ophthalmology at Peking Union Medical College, who observed the proliferation of foreign

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[21] "Beijing de zhian 北平的治安" (Public security in Beiping), *Dagong bao*, May 3, 1946.

[22] Yang Jingyue, *Zhongguo de Fanzui Wenti yu Shehui Bianqian de Guanxi* 中國的犯罪問題與社會變遷的關係 (The issue of crime in relation to social change in China) (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1986), 192.

[23] In the early twentieth century, China witnessed the emergence of a "social survey movement." Social scientists in a large number who sought to transform China into a nation-state were ardent in the movement. See Tong Lam, *A Pasion for Facts: Social Surveys and the Construction of the Chinese Nation-Sate, 1900-1949* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

[24] Yan Jingyue, *Zhongguo de Fanzui Wenti yu Shehui Bianqian de Guanxi*, 13.

weapons in the late 1920s Manchuria. During his tenure at the college, Howard and his eleven year-old son were kidnapped by a group of Manchurian bandits in 1926 and were held for ten weeks. As noted in his famous memoir of this adventure *Ten Weeks with Chinese Bandits*, "most of the rifles [used by these bandits] were of Russian manufacture, of the years 1904 or 1917 as indicated by the stamps upon them. Several had Japanese rifles with the emblem of the 'rising sun' on their barrels." Some other rifles included German type and that of Chinese manufacture by Hanyang or Mueken arsenals.[25] With respect to the small arms, Dr. Howard noted they were exclusively Mauser pistols of German origin. Speaking in fluent Chinese and treating the bandits' ailments with care, Howard quickly gained their trust. He was informed that these rifles were typically expensive, ranging up to $150 per piece, while a German made Mauser pistol might cost over than $350.[26] Because of this, these guns mostly served a deterrent purpose, and none of the bandits had ambition to learn shooting through costly practicing. The sources of their weapon supply could be myriad: some of them retained the guns during their service as soldiers; some guns were procured from smugglers in an underground market in Harbin, an already

[25] Harvey J. Howard. *Ten Weeks with Chinese Bandits* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1927), 93.

[26] Ibild., 93-94.

international city at the time;[27] bandits might also benefit from their secured relations with nearby warlord soldiers who supplied them with needed weapons.

Yan's social survey and Howard's eyewitness account, on close scrutiny, displayed one significant historical transition in modern China: outlaws and bandits gradually replaced their cold steel weapon or bird guns to the powerful foreign guns, including the ones manufactured by newly established arsenals in China. Both the popular belief and government action held that the gun is intrinsically the more lethal weapon than other weapons like swords, knives, or daggers. As it will be addressed in the next few chapters, both the Qing and Republican governments took efforts to maintain the monopoly of the most powerful weapons, and enacted restrict laws to regulate private gun ownership. Their policies with respect to firearms reflected an anxiety that unregulated guns had the potential to endanger public security or even the basis of legitimate rulership. Because the gun was more powerful weapon whereas alternative weapons including sword and knife were less so. Urban crimes or rural bandits chose guns precisely because they were determined to bring death or deterrence when they committed the crime. From the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, urban outlaws and rural bandits took advantage of the underground firearms circulation network, seeking to arm themselves with advanced foreign

[27] Following the construction of the Chinese Eastern Railway in 1898, Harbin, once a small village, grew into one of the most modern metropolis in the Far East. In the early twentieth century, especially after Russia's defeat in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), sixteenth countries established their consulates and foreign merchants started to operate business. See James H. Carter, *Creating a Chinese Harbin: Nationalism in an International City, 1916-1932* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002). The cases of gun smuggling were frequently reported in local newspapers. Westerners took advantage of extraterritoriality in China and engaged in gun smuggling, while Chinese officials were not able to control. See "Zhu jiangjun qing jihe junxie zhi biantong banfa 朱将军请稽核军械之变通办法" (General Zhu called for using alternative means to investigate military weapon smuggling," *Shengjing Shibao*, September 4, 1915.

guns. The symbolism of the gun as a tool of violence was reinforced given the frequency of criminal activities.

Guns, Self-defense, and Modernity

From the late nineteenth century, there was a multiplicity of Chinese terms denoting modern guns. The characters *yangqiang* 洋槍 (foreign gun) might be the first terms used to distinguish this Western weapon with traditional bird gun. Another term *kuaiqiang* 快槍 (quick gun) denoted the foreign gun's accuracy and advanced technique. During the Republican period, for the urban civilian, another term *ziwei qiangzhi* 自衛槍支 (self-defense gun) was commonly used, which blurred the gun's place of origin and style, but denoting its function in self-defense.[28] We have no clue how the civilians accepted these terms in their social life. What is confirmed is that most terms were initiated by the state rather than society. The state allowed the civilians to own guns to defend themselves. For the most people other than bandits and crimes, the foreign gun provided them the means to protect themselves and their communities.

Therefore, armed people were comprised of not only these rural bandits and urban outlaws, but also many ordinary civilians. The urban middle class was the first group to embrace foreign guns.[29] The introduction of foreign guns from the late nineteenth century allowed the new middle

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[28] Governments of the late Qing and early Republic made clear difference between the guns used by ordinary civilians and the ones by crimes. The legal documents referred the guns owned by civilians as self-defense guns. See Cai Hongyuan 蔡鴻源 ed. *Minguo Fagui Jicheng* 民國法規集成 (The collections of law in Republican China) (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 1999).

[29] According to Richard Curt Kraus, "the makeup of the Chinese middle class has varied over time." During the late Qing and Republican periods, members of the urban middle class were mostly urban bourgeoisie, government officials, and intellectuals. See Richard Curt Kraus, *Pianos and Politics in China: Middle-Class Ambitions and the Struggle over Western Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 24.

class to use the modern firearms directly, rather than experiencing a transition from the traditional weapons to the modern ones. For the urban wealthy dwellers, the foreign gun brought them both security and a feeling of elevated social status. First, as discussed above, the frequency of criminal activities pushed them to acquire more powerful weapons. Second, they were interested in most recent foreign guns as a symbol of prestige. For example, 143 pistols owned by ordinary civilians were registered with the Beiping municipal police department in 1947, over ninety percent of which were manufactured by foreign firearm companies, including Remington, Colt, Winchester, Browning, and many others.[30]

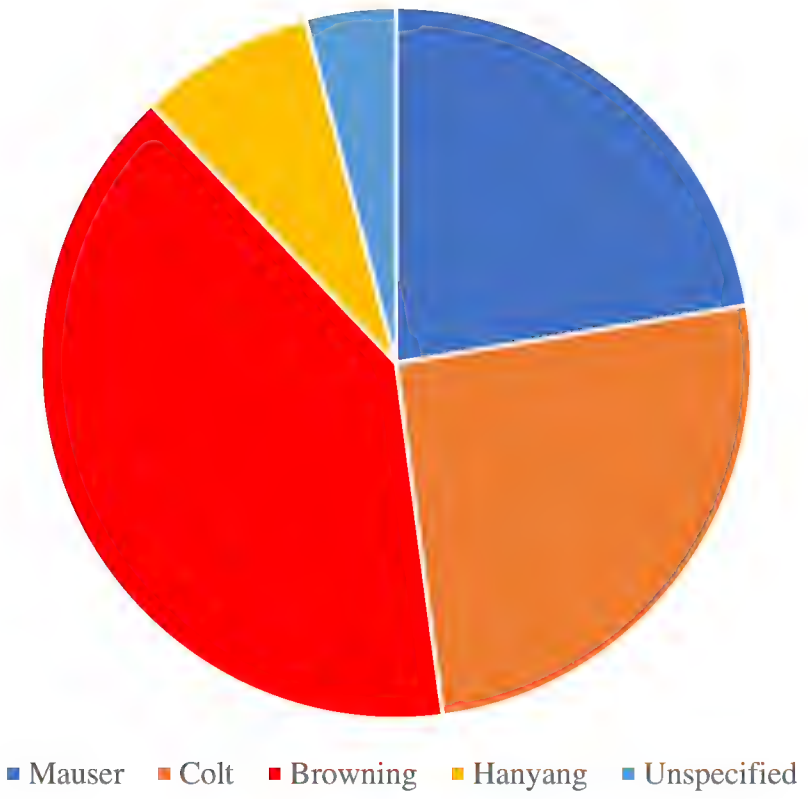

Figure 3: The Types of Guns Owned by Beijing Dwellers in 1947. SOURCE: Beijing Municipal Archives, J181-014-00746.

[30] Beijing Municipal Archives, JH00122-22122-1321.

The small number of registered guns on file would not give the Beiping police a sense of security. Certainly, for a majority of gun owners, firearm registration was meaningless. At the same time, gun licensing was not harshly enforced. The fluid character of armed bandits and large number of unregistered guns in society make any conclusion about the distribution and extent of gun ownership among different groups must be tentative. All these accounts, nevertheless, suggest that gun ownership, as one major sign of serious social instability was particularly prevalent in modern Chinese society. These eyewitness accounts also indicate the civilian weapon underwent a dramatic transition from cold steel arms and bird guns to more powerful guns manufactured by foreign firearms companies or their Chinese counterparts. Prior to the late nineteenth century, civilian weapon was always composed of knives, spears, swords, and low-quality bird gun, which could be made locally with indigenous method (土辦法 *tubanfa*).

In the years following Qing China's dramatic decline through foreign aggression and devastating popular uprisings, owning a foreign made gun gradually became a prerequisite for exhibiting strength. The bandits, as mentioned by Dr. Howard, obtained the foreign guns in the black market at an expensive price, though they only displayed their weapons rather than shooting others. This transition was also embodied in the practices of collective defense. When local community decided to organize a militia for self-defense purpose, their first act was always to search for powerful foreign guns. For example, when Linyu County of Zhili 直隸 Province was constantly harassed by roving bandits, local community led by commercial gentry elite contributed funds to purchase two hundred Mauser guns and other armament in Tianjin, a nearby port city, which appeared as a convenient inlet for arms due to the city's frequent foreign

contacts.[31] As will be discussed in the second chapter, militia was poorly equipped in pre-modern period partly because their defense activities were monitored by the government, and also due to their weapons outclassed the sporadic outlaws. When bandits started to arm themselves with powerful weapons, local militia resorted to more powerful weapons to maintain their defensive poise. As indicated in the Linyu's case, one source of foreign guns was treaty ports where civilians could the weapons they needed to fight rebels or defend themselves.

To understand the tremendous social change brought about by foreign gun ownership, the foremost question deserved to be studied is what factors account for the ready access to guns for non-military individuals. The foreign gun's pouring into modern China did not mean Chinese traditional bird guns withdrew from the historical stage completely. Rather, it is much safer to argue that the diffusion of foreign guns added complexity to public order situations, especially in some violence-prone regions that were already filled with obsolete bird guns. The diffusion pattern of private weapons developed from the late nineteenth century and bore many similarities with the one of traditional bird gun. Just as the matchlock introduced into China in the sixteenth century, regions differed apparently in how readily they received the exotic weapon. In some most interior provinces, living without frequent foreign contacts, the spread of foreign commodities was less rapid than the coastal regions or treaty ports that were subject to the intrusion of foreign elements. Another similarity is that both periods witnessed a process of foreign weapon's domestication, which took place not only in state-operated arsenals, but also among civilians themselves.

[31] "Juban Xiangtuan 舉辦鄉團," *Dagong bao,* January 11, 1910.

Beyond Violence: The Gun's Symbolism in Popular Culture

Prior to the early twentieth century, gun's symbolic role as a brutal and evil implement was always highlighted in popular culture. The elite ideal in traditional China was to esteem literacy and to despise martiality (重文輕武 *Zhongwen qingwu*).[32] The cultural tradition made ordinary people's use of firearms inevitably marginalized. Chinese writers of the late Qing did not conceal their disdain and disgust about the private gun ownership, which was associated with banditry and outlaw activities, if their use of the gun was not officially sanctioned. Liu E (刘鹗 1857-1909), expressed such sentiment in his famous late Qing semi-autobiography *The Travels of Lao Can* (老殘遊記 *Lao Can youji*). He presented a story, in which a local magistrate found a wealthy and educated family concealed bird guns when the magistrate chased a group of bandits. Even though the family explained they purchased guns for self-defense against roving bandits, the magistrate himself believed that the family had colluded with bandits, because "good civilians would never dare to obtain military weapons."[33]

The frequency of urban crime and banditry created an urgent need for self-defense, which also reinforced the symbolism of gun as tool for deterrence and protection from danger. The gun's image in public culture was not limited to its instrumental role in the early twentieth century. As China's sovereignty was severely trampled by Japan from the early 1930s, another

[32] For the elite ideal on *wen* and *wu*, see Nicolas Schillinger, *The Body and Military Masculinity in Late Qing and Early Republican China* (Lanham: Lexington Book, 2016); Kam Louie, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity: Society and Gender in China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[33] Liu E, *Lao Can Youji* (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 2004), 25.

symbolism was attached to the gun by Chinese intellectuals, who used cartoons, woodcuts, or other forms of art to articulate its new meanings.

An analysis of the image of gun presented in visual arts allows us to examine how the popular culture illustrated the image of the gun. These intellectuals, through their brushes and pens, gave gun another meaning beyond killing or self-defense.[34] More explicitly, they tended to show the gun as a weapon to protect the nation and to fight against Japanese imperialist. One of the practitioners was Zhang Mingcao (張明曹 1911-1978), one of major woodcut artists and painters in Republican China. During the second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), Zhang used his woodcut and cartoons to stir people's emotion and to increase people's patriotism.[35] The frequent appearance of the image of the gun in his woodcut indicated that Chinese intellectuals like Zhang Mingcao vested gun another symbolism.

Zhang Mingcao received training in painting and woodcut in Shanghai in the early 1930s, when the Chinese modern woodcut movement was reaching its climax.[36] After the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War, Zhang and other artists were active in promoting people's patriotism by using their vernacular arts. In 1938, Zhang Mingcao published the woodcut work *hostility* (仇 chou), which made him well-known in the field of Chinese woodcut. [37] In this work,

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[34] See Paul Graham Bevan, "Manhua Artists in Shanghai 1926-1938: From Art-for-Art's-Sake to Wartime Propaganda," PhD dissertation, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 2010.

[35] For the biographical introduction of Zhang Mingcao, see Ma Chengyuan 馬成源, *Zhongguo Meishu Dacidian* 中國美術大辭典 (Encyclopedia of Chinese painting) (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2002), 936.

[36] For the woodcut movement, see Xiaobing Tang, *Origins of the Chinese Avant-garde: The Modern Woodcut Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

[37] Zhang Mingcao, *Zhang Mingcao Ji: Banhua Juan* 張明曹集: 版畫卷 (The collections of Zhan Mingcao, Woodcuts) (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 2002).

Zhang illustrated a blacksmith who and his family were forced to seek refuge from the Japanese invasion. They met a group of Japanese army on the way, who looted their belongings and arrested them. His wife was raped and killed, while he was ordered to work for the army. Later, the gunsmith escaped and stole a rifle from the Japanese soldier. Zhang Mingcao used a couple of woodcuts to illustrate how the gunsmith used the gun to take part in the guerrilla war against the Japanese. In this woodcut work, the image of gun was subjected to change. It was initially described as a tool to kill Chinese people, which was later transformed into a tool against Japanese invaders. When the gunsmith took up the rifle that he stole from a Japanese soldier to participate in the guerrilla war, the symbolism of gun was to provoke Chinese people's resolution to fight and to defend the nation.

Zhang Mingcao's other cartoon and woodcut similarly indicated gun's symbolism as a determination to fight against the Japanese. In another woodcut work entitled Reaphook (鐮刀 *Liandao*), Zhang described a rural woman who encouraged her husband to kill the Japanese enemies with a rifle. She took up the reap-hook instead. Similarly, Zhang's work *Arming the Masses* (民眾武裝起來 *Mingzhong wuzhuang qilai*) conveyed the message that motivated Chinese people armed themselves with rifles against the threat.

Figure 4: *Reaphook* by Zhang Mingcao. SOURCE: Zhang Mingcao, *Zhang Mingcao Ji: Banhua Juan*, 61.

Figure 5: *Arming the Masses* by Zhang Mingcao. SOURCE: Zhang Mingcao, *Zhang Mingcao Ji: Banhua Juan*, 77.

Zhang's work was one among many art forms that illustrated the image of guns. Historian Chang-Tai Hung believes these works reflected "the political and social conditions of the age and offered valuable insight into popular attitudes."[38] However, in the war context, we have no clues about how the general public understood these works. In other words, it is unclear how many civilians then sought to arm themselves after reading these works. Chinese intellectuals and artists drew images of the gun in the belief that they would arouse people to "resist rather than cooperate with the Japanese invaders." As Louise Edwards' work on wartime cartoons on

[38] Chang-Tai Hung, "War and Peace in Feng Zikai's Wartime Cartoons," *Modern China* 16 (1990): 39-84.

sexual violence suggests, "the efficacy of these images as instruments designed to spur resistance and resolve remains in doubt."[39] This similar uncertainty also happened on Zhang Mingcao's woodcut on the image of a gun. Ultimately, these images reveal the attitudes of Chinese intellectuals and artists on violence and resolution against Japanese invasion, in which the power of arming the masses loomed largely. These artists' works indicated that the meaning of the gun was floating. More than a symbol of cruelty, it was a tool could be used to defend the nation.

Chinese Women with Guns

Unlike during the Qing period when the use of the gun was a monopoly of man, the transformative Republican period witnessed the involvement of women. As mentioned in the beginning, in the early twentieth century, wealthy ladies in modern Shanghai played a part in the shooting clubs or participated in competitions held by male-dominated associations. In this case, her sporting shooting activity was sanctioned and even encouraged by her husband, who was also interested in shooting in the club. Of course, the experience of Li Junzeng, who lived in an illustrious family in cosmopolitan Shanghai could not apply to all Chinese women in the early twentieth century, whose subordinate feminine roles had not been shaken.[40] As many cases suggest, Chinese women's involvement in the use of guns extended beyond shooting activities. They took up either pistol or rifles for several other reasons. Some women showed out their skills in shooting to protect themselves, their families, and their communities. Foreign guns also provided female criminals the tools to practice violence or to take part in banditry. However, it

[39] Louise Edwards, "Drawing Sexual Violence in Wartime China: Anti-Japanese Propaganda Cartoons," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 72 (2013): 581.

[40] A number of works have been dedicated to the position of women in modern China. For a historiographical review of the existing literature, see Gail Hershatter, *Women in China's Long Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

would be misleading to argue that that Chinese women empowered themselves with guns to alter their subordinate position. Then, how does the women's use of guns broaden our perspective of gender and feminism in modern China?

When foreign gun appeared in Chinese society, it was deemed an efficient tool to commit violence. In the urban areas where female offenders had little difficulties to obtain firearms, foreign guns were more likely to be used in homicides and other criminal activities. From these criminal cases, the role of Chinese women in these gun-involved cases could be detected. In the early spring of 1935, Liu Jinggui 劉景貴, a twenty-four years old female student at Beiping Fine Arts Academy realized that his rival in love (情敵 *qingdi*) Teng Shuang 騰雙 taught physical education at Zhicheng Girl's Middle School. On March 16, 1935, Liu made her way to the school's dormitory where Teng had been residing. Teng Shuang had never met Liu Jingming before, nor had she discovered her husband, Lu Ming 錄明, had an extramarital affair with Liu. When the two young women met in the dorm, Liu quickly pulled out her American Browning pistol hidden in her satchel, and instantly shot Teng Shuang seven times in her head, shoulder, chest, and elbow. Recognizing her death, Liu fled the scene, but was apprehended immediately by the school guard, who heard the gunshots on campus.

After two years' interrogation by the Beiping municipal court, Liu was convicted of murder and sentenced to life imprisonment. As the interrogation went on, more details about the Liu Jinggui's case were released. According to Liu Jinggui's confession, she got engaged to Lu Ming, an award-winning shot-put player in the April of 1934, who, however, broke their betrothal promises months later as he fell in love with Teng Shuang. Liu agreed finally by accepting six hundred *yuan* from Lu and Teng. However, their relationship continued to be intimate underground. In March of 1935, they had been engaged in a clandestine love affair in a

Beiping hotel for five days. After that, Liu personally realized that it was Teng who broke their engagement and decided to kill her for revenge.[41]

Liu Jinggui's crime resembled another well-known homicide case that happened in the same year. Shi Jianqiao (施劍翹 1906-1979) assassinated former warlord Sun Chuanfang (孫傳芳 1885-1935) in Tianjin's foreign concession with a Browning pistol, the same model as Liu Jinggui's weapon. In that scene, Shi declared that she avenged the death of her father who was killed by Sun ten years earlier. Both cases immediately received considerable coverage and crystallized extensive public debate over whether passion, or *qing* would help exonerate the assassins. In her pioneering studies of both cases, Eugenia Lean likewise considered that the public sentiments surrounding the assassinations indicated the formation of a new "critical urban public," through which different social groups could interact with the government, and ultimately could "sway legal proceedings, threaten the moral authority of cultural elites, mediate center-warlord relations, and influence the state's tactics in legitimating its power" in the Republican period.[42] Contemporary writers and reporters who vigorously made commentary on Liu and Shi's cases indeed helped arouse such public sympathy, underlying the role of passion (*qing*) squeezed from love or filial piety in exonerating female's violent behavior in Republican China.

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[41] Beijing Municipal Archives 北京市檔案館, *Beiping Difang Fayuan Xingshi Panjue Anjuan* 北平地方法院刑事判決案卷 (Criminal Judgement Document of Beiping Local Court) (Beijing: Quanguo tushuguan wenxian suowei fuzhi zhongxin, 2005).

[42] Eugenia Lean, *Public Passions: The Trial of Shi Jianqiao and the Rise of Popular Sympathy in Republican China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 12. For a detailed analysis of Liu Jinggui's case, see Lean, "Liu Jinggui Qingsha'an: Sanshi Niandai Beiping de Dazhong Wenhua yu Meiti Caozuo 劉景詩案：三十年代北京的大眾文化與媒體操作" (Love with a vengeance: media sensation in Republican-era Beiping), in *Beijing: Urban Culture and Historial Memory*, eds., Chen Pingyuan and David Wang (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2005), 269-84.

Moreover, yet, once we delve into the details of the case, especially the actual process of the murder, we may realize some new and heretofore unnoticed elements in the early twentieth-century Chinese urban life. When contemporary reporters and writers commented on both cases, they did not feel astonished that even educated Chinese women, who were always portrayed as delicate, docile, and dependent in the pre-modern period had no difficulties to obtain foreign-made guns to commit violence.

Given that successive Chinese governments constantly introduced controls regulating the sale and ownership of weapons of any kind, how were Liu Jingshi and Shi Jianqiao able to acquire Browning pistols? According to the intricate and thoroughly documented interrogation carried out by the professional Beiping police officers, Liu Jingshi confessed that she had brought the gun along with seven bullets from an unknown rickshaw puller for eighty-four *yuan*.[43] Existing records, however, do not tell us whether the policemen searched the rickshaw puller who sold gun, or even further investigated a potential black market that helped the gun diffusion. Due to the large number of rickshaw pullers and demographic mobility in Republican Beiping, it was of course impracticable for the police agency to trigger an optimistic investigation. In Tianjin, Shi Jianqiao claimed that she bought the Browning along with six bullets from a defeated solider for sixty *yuan*.[44]

The function of the gun was not confined to commit violence, modern women who acquired gun aimed to protect themselves and their families. In Shanghai, a shooting club organized shooting practices for wealthy ladies, showing them how to protect themselves with a

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[43] Beijing Municipal Archives, *Beiping Difang Fayuan Xingshi Panjue Anjuan*, 25.

[44] "Shi Jianqiao Qingsha weifu baochou 施劍翹情殺為父報仇" *Dagong bao*, November 22, 1935.

gun. Trading companies also sold women tiny pistols, which could be easily put in their purses.[45] In wartime China, when their husbands were drafted into the army, women learned shooting to protect their communities. In the Nanhai County of Guangdong province, for example, a majority of males joined the army during the Second Sino-Japanese War, leaving mostly women and elderly in the villages. Local women organized all-female militia forces to protect their villages. They got the weapon from local elite or government.[46]

Figure 6: "In farming, In training, and in practicing." SOURCE: *Zhanwang* 展望, no. 10 (1939): 25.

[45] "Shouqiang de Renshi 手槍的認識," *Zhonghua* 中華, no. 46 (1936): 27.

[46] "Nanhai Nuzhuangshi Chudong 南海女壯士出動," *Zhanwang* 展望, no. 10 (1939): 25.

Women's use of guns did not mean they successfully altered their subordinate position by participating in masculine activities. Rather, their use of guns suggested at least two important changes in modern China. First, the introduction of the foreign gun, which was much easy to operate, shortened the power gap between male and female. If Liu Jingshi's case was not sufficient to prove it because both the victim was another woman, Shi Jianqiao's case certainly did. A woman with no shooting experience was able to kill a former warlord with her Browning pistol. The introduction of the foreign gun made hand to hand combat unnecessary. Second, women's use of guns against the perceived threat reveals how these armed Chinese women placed themselves in national politics. The gun gave them certain degree of autonomy to protect themselves, rather than relying on their husbands as before. In this sense, the use of the gun legitimized their engagement with the politics.

Gun and Power Domination in Republican China

In Republican China, access to weapons became a resource for ambitious individuals or groups of men who saw opportunities in the wielding of local power. For example, the Sangzhi County 桑植縣 of Hunan Province established a salt tax bureau in the early 1915 and obtained twelve guns to defend against rapacious bandits. He Long (賀龍 1896-1969), a local bandit organized a group of adherents to attack the bureau with two cleavers and seized these guns. He Long then utilized the guns to commit banditry, and later formed military unit to obtain his local dominance. Gradually, his military prominence allowed him to become a Communist general. It is clear from this case that the guns acquired new meanings along with the change of context.

They alternated from the tools of defense to the tools of committing violence, and finally facilitated ambitious individuals to obtain power dominance. [47]

In the early twentieth century, China underwent rapid and tremendous changes: the *keju* system (科舉 civil service examination) was abolished; the late imperial dynasty was overthrown; the whole country was exposed to the outside world. One of the most striking features was the process of militarization had accelerated, transforming the traditional power structure, in which Confucian elites collaborated with the state officials to manage local affairs. Under the condition of local militarization, local elites, who were previously authorized privileges through classical education, now had to find other ways to secure their local dominance or gave away to newly emerged martial elite. For example, in the early 1910s, the Qian family of Wuxi City, a great literary elite lineage in the prosperous Jiangnan region, wasted little time to purchase foreign guns and trained local people to use them to defend their communities. At least in part, this was a response to the new social and political situation, in which traditional ways of obtaining social status gradually gave way to the channels of obtaining military dominance.

Circulation Mechanisms

We have examined the circumstances under which Chinese people of different strata owned and used guns. By the early twentieth century, mainly as a consequence of increasing social turmoil and the fears of personal safety, the private gun ownership became widespread in many regions. The diverse values and meanings people attached to their arms were also

[47] Zhonggong dangshi renwu yanjiuhui 中共黨史人物研究會, ed. *Zhong Gong dangshi renwu zhuan* 中共黨史人物傳 (Chinese Communist party history biographies), vol. 2 (Xian: Shanxi Renin chubanshe, 1980), 129-31.

embodied in the circulation mechanisms, which provided people with varied demands the weapons. The circulation of guns shared some characteristics of the circulation of other commodities. That is to say, a two-tiered pattern of consumption was in place. As what historian Frank Dikötter has argued in the research on Chinese consumer culture, "[I]n a country marked by opposition between the poverty of the many and the riches of the few," the "imports were used by elites as visual evidence of social status, while cheap imitations satisfied the demand for new products among ordinary people both were included in a culture which worshipped the tangible and craved the new."[48] Dikötter's assertion of the two-tiered consumption of everyday commodities also applied to the circulation of guns. A wide gap existed between the well-off elites who conspicuously demanded sophisticated and accurate foreign guns of greater quality and the ordinary individuals or groups who armed themselves with affordable and even primitive ones. Another reason to examine the circulation mechanisms lay in the transformation of values when guns moved from one location to another. Whether by purchase, theft, or pickup, the weapon's original values and function also underwent some sorts of transformation.

Commerce

From the late nineteenth century, as China was no longer hermetically sealed off from the outside world, foreign guns, like many other exotic commodities, found their ways into China, making them available to many non-military individuals. To some extent, the circulation of guns shared some common features of the circulation of other commodities, which required the concerted effort among manufactures, intermediaries, and consumers. Previous scholarship has identified China's position in the global arms market. The arms acquisitions from abroad started

[48] Frank Dikötter, *Exotic Commodities: Modern Objects and Everyday Life in China*, 262.

from the 1860s when the late Qing reformers endeavored to modernize its military equipment, and reached peak in the warlord period as the acquisition of powerful weapons was a major determinant for warlords to obtain power.[49] The internecine military conflicts and China's urgent need for military modernization made many western gun manufacturers regard China as a potential market.[50] Previous research on the arms trade does not provide a full picture as historians tend to underestimate how these foreign guns made themselves available to a large portion of the non-military population.

Innovations in guns started to accelerate in the Western countries, manufacturing revolvers first and the later semi-automatic pistols. The advent of easily operated and accurate foreign guns provided modernizing elites and the emerging middle-class people the weapons they required to protect themselves and their families. As discussed above, the gun registration records of the Beijing Municipal Archives suggested the wealthy people always chose Mauser, Colt, and Browning pistols as their weapons. Even though an underground black market flourished in the early twentieth century, through which some criminals found no difficulties to obtain foreign guns to commit violence, most wealthy civilians like Mr. and Mrs. Li Junseng turned to foreign trading companies to purchase foreign guns at high prices.

From the late nineteenth century, foreign companies actively explored the Chinese market to sell their arms. In contrast to the Western countries, in which gun manufacturers portrayed their products as symbols of masculinity or social status to attract their customers,

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[49] For the arms trade in modern China, see Anthony Chan, *Arming the Chinese: The Western Armaments Trade in Warlord China, 1920-1928* (Vancouver: The University of British Columbia Press, 2010).

[50] Ibid.

arms sellers in China always promoted the connection between firearms and self-defense.[51] In a period marred by internecine military conflicts, robbery, and banditry, Western gun manufactures were aware that their potential consumers placed a higher priority on the gun's ability to defend themselves. According to the private gun registration records preserved at the Shanghai and Beijing Municipal Archives, the emerging Chinese middle-class preferred Colt, Browning, and Mauser.

These three firearm manufacturers ardently explored the Chinese market, by either dispatching sales representatives or distributing advertisements to attract Chinese consumers.[52] Sales representatives were sent to China in large numbers to dispose of their surplus of firearms. Their primary consumers were undoubtedly contending military powers. During the early Republican period, when China suffered from the political turmoil caused by warlordism. As Anthony Chan suggests, "the issue of an armaments stockpile was always a concern of the warlords," who competed to purchase powerful foreign arms to secure their political dominance in their sphere.[53] Sales representatives were sent to China in a large number, who built consolidated personal relations with various warlords. Existing documents reveal little about their activities in China. It is extremely difficult to detect how these sales representatives came to contact directly with Chinese civilians. What can be conjectured was that they took advantage of the trip in China and advertised their products by all means. For example, Henry Brewer, who were dispatched by the Winchester Repeating Company based in Hartford, Connecticut in the

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[51] For the information of the gun advertising in Western countries, see R. Blake Brown, *Arming and Disarming: A History of Gun Control in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 81-131.

[52] Chan, *Arming the Chinese*, 20.

[53] Ibid., 129.

late 1890s to sell the arms to the late Qing government. While he was in China, he took any occasions to promote the image of Winchester rifles to local Chinese elites. When he was in Hankou, he found that local people were firing the cannon to break down and drive away the cloud devils, as the region had had months of heavy rains. However, their firming seemed not to bring any change. The clouds did not break up. As recalled by Henry Brewer, he saw the opportunity and used his arms manufactured by Winchester to shot at the sky. A few days later, the weather was fair, and he thus produced "an excellent ad for their guns."[54]

Advertising was a major channel for the circulation of modern commodities, which also applied to the sale of weapons. The Colt Company placed this Chinese pamphlet in the major trading companies of China, which were then available for Chinese consumers to read. We have no clues about the role of advertisements played in selling their products. Since most western arms manufacturers sold Chinese people weapons through intermediaries, which appeared as trading companies in treaty ports. Trading companies in many cases simply published their advertisements in local newspapers. In the early twentieth century, gun advertisements appeared in the *Shengjing Shibao*, a major newspaper in Manchuria. Japanese trading companies such as Mitsui and Taicho had the list of their weapons in the newspaper.[55] Existing sources do not reveal detailed information about their consumers. In the late Qing and early Republican period, ordinary civilians and local militia forces were eligible to purchase firearms in these trading

[54] William Henry Brewer Papers, Yale University Archives.

[55] Some trading companies published advertisements in local newspaper, in which the types of guns were listed. A few examples include "Taicang yanghang gaobai 太倉洋行告白," *Shengjing Shibao*, September 1, 1906; "Gangcun yanghang guanggao 廣存央行廣告," *Shengjing Shibao*, September 7, 1906.

companies, only if they obtained licenses from the local government. It is hard to suggest how many civilians purchased guns from these companies.

The Colt Manufacturing Company, headquartered in West Hartford Connecticut sought to expand the Chinese market by emphasizing Colt pistol's superior performance. The company's marketing strategies offer a prime case to reveal how arms manufacturers were connected with Chinese consumers. Given the social context of China in which the sentiment of insecurity dominated civilian life from the late nineteenth century, Colt advertised to wealthy Chinese civilians with language that portrayed its pistol as the "treasured object for self-defenders." In this printed advertisement, the Colt emphasized its product was the "most stable, most accurate, and most reliable." [56]

[56] The Colt Repeating Company Collection, Connecticut State Archives, HS 4803.

Figure 7: Gun Advertisements from the Colt's Manufacturing Company. SOURCE: Colt Collection, Connecticut State Library, 974.62. H2572.

Regular commerce became an important way for Chinese people to obtain firearms. As discussed above, the prevalence of private gun ownership was determined by two factors: availability of firearms in market and increasing demand from Chinese consumers who required guns for self-defense. Though not in large numbers, regular commerce provided eligible individuals or groups to obtain guns of the most recent design. However, it does not mean the wealthy middle class and some militia forces were only customers of trading companies. In many cases, urban outlaws and bandits could purchase guns from trading companies clandestinely. Though the Nationalist government enacted law prohibiting these companies from selling arms to individuals or groups without government permit, the prohibition was not

effectively implemented.[57] The distribution of guns in modern China was highly uneven. Determining social status, many other Chinese had limited access to the foreign guns from regular commerce. Other heterodox channels ranging from smuggling, self-production, and transference from military, played more dominant role in making firearms circulate in local society.

From Military Weapon to Civilian Weapon

While the 1911 Revolution had successfully brought down the Manchu reign and established the new Chinese Republic, China had continued to experience a rising level of social disorder and disunity until 1949. Yuan Shikai's betrayal of the revolution and eagerness to restore the monarchy provoked immediate protests from revolutionaries and military governors of most provinces. Yuan's death in 1916 shook off the restraints he imposed upon provincial militarists and created a political vacuum which military governors or warlords competed to fill in. A period of warlordism ensued from 1916 to 1928, appearing as one of the most disastrous episodes in modern China. The whole nation was sucked into chaotic military struggles among warlords and Sun Yat-sen's National Revolutionary Army. One Republican economist calculated that almost all the provinces had suffered from military conflicts during this period. On average, bloody conflicts hit more than seven provinces annually from 1916 and 1924, and about 14 provinces after 1924.[58] Since military force always played a decisive role in consolidating and expanding political influence, warlords competed to accumulate military strengthen through recruiting soldiers and acquiring weapons. By the 1920s, the total number of military individuals

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[57] "Shanghai haiguan jinyun junxie zhi xinguize 上海海關禁運軍械之新規則," *Shengjing Shibao*, February 10, 1916.

[58] Shaohua Hu, *Explaining Chinese Democratization* (Westport: Praeger, 2000), 56.

was being conservatively estimated at over two million, four times than that of ten years before.[59]

The increasing numbers of soldiers and incessant military conflicts during the early Republican period facilitated the diffusion of weapons into local society. In many cases, defeated or runaway soldiers either carried their guns away with them, or transferred their weapons to bandits or militia forces.[60] It was during the period of warlordism that the transference from military weapons to civilian weapons reached its climax. For example, after the Feng-Zhi War 奉直戰爭 in 1922, "warlords' army was dismissed, and many soldiers ran away. Almost all the soldiers took away their arms, which endangered public security."[61] After the battle, local peasants picked up the leftover guns or ammunitions and then sold them to either bandits or militia forces. According to a 1922 newspaper report, local police found a peasant drove a big cart with six baskets on it. It was found that he put more than 10,000 rounds of ammunition in the basket.[62] In other cases, bandits or outlaws stole or seized guns owned by either individuals or militia forces, which, too, helped the gun's transference from military guns to non-military ones.

Self-Production

The final means by which guns circulated was by private production. As discussed above, for the most rural population, foreign guns at an expensive price were hardly affordable to the

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[59] Diana Lary, *Warlord Soldiers: Chinese Common Soldiers, 1911-1937* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 189.

[60] This phenomenon was explicitly identified by Edward McCord. See McCord, *Military Force and Elite Power in the Formation of Modern China*, 88.

[61] "Tongzhi Zhuijiao Qiangxie 通知追繳槍械," *Shengjing shibo*, July 11, 1922.

[62] "Chahuo Siyun Qiangxie 查獲私存槍械," *Shengjing shibao*, August 6, 1922.

most ordinary people, who also needed guns to defend themselves. Many underground channels, in addition to smuggling, provided these people the primitive guns they required. When the foreign guns were introduced into China in the late nineteenth century, local gunsmiths quickly acquired a rudimentary technical know-how, producing less sophisticated weapons. If the gun smuggling was an integral part of the coastal landscape, private production became one major ways for the interior regions to get their weapons.

Conclusion

Traditional Chinese values placed a heavy importance on harmony and benevolence, which gave preference to civil rather than military virtues. Of the major philosophical schools that deployed pacific sentiments, Daoism arguably displayed the most disgust over the use of weapons. This belief was duly reflected in Laozi's *Daodejing* 道德經 as follows "Now arms, however beautiful, are instruments of evil omen, hateful, it may be said, to all creatures. Therefore, they who have the *Dao* do not like to employ them."[63] Notwithstanding the predominance of the pacifistic value in Chinese tradition, the presence of weapons among civilians was not uncommon in history. When the first explosive small arms first landed in China through Japanese pirates in the sixteenth century, many Chinese civilians had been arming themselves with traditional cold steel weapons for millennia. Ordinary people had various occasions to bear weapons, including hunting, self-defense, or practicing martial arts.[64] In the period of political tension and deteriorated economic situation, peasants in an attempt to advance

[63] James Legge, trans., *The Texts of Taoism*, in *The Sacred Books of China* (New York: Dover Publications, 1962), 73-74.

[64] For the weapons used by Chinese martial artists, see Peter A. Lorge, *Chinese Martial Arts: From Antiquity to the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

their marginal social status might take up their primitive weapons at hand against wicked rulers. One typical example was the late Ming peasant rebellion led by Li Zicheng 李自成 (1606-1645), whose rebel army successfully overthrew the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). When the rebellion was still in its infancy, their primary weapons consisted of spears, swords, bows, and arrows.[65] The representations of weapons also appeared in literary forms. Wandering knights-errant, righteous bandits, and armed swordsmen were portrayed in classic literature as intrepid heroes, who devoted themselves to helping the poor and the oppressed. *Water Margin* 水滸傳, a great classic novel dedicated to a group of rebel heroes who organized a brotherhood community to defy the North Song Dynasty (960-1127), illustrates the magic use of eighteen types of weapons by those romantic rebels in the fight for justice.[66] The manifestation of arms into both material and virtual forms attested that the privately-owned weapon had more or less penetrated into everyday lives of a large section of the population.

When China started its military modernization efforts in the 1860s, foreign guns were introduced into China, which provided Chinese people alternative choices of weapons. Since then, the gun was no longer a monopoly of the government. In 1880, Zou Tao (鄒濤 1850-1931), a novelist and newspaper editor moved to Shanghai, where he devoted himself to writing a courtesan novel, *The Shadows of Heaven and Earth in Shanghai* (海上塵天影 *Haishang chentianying*), which was published in 1904. Zou lived in a colorful life. He obtained the prestigious Flowering Talent (秀才 xiucai) degree, and then became ardently interested in

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[65] Peng Sunyi 彭孫貽, *Ping kou zhi* 平寇志 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1984), vol 6. 87.

[66] Zhang Qiyun 張其昀, eds., Zh*ongwen Dacidian* 中文大辭典 (Taipei: Zhongguo wenhu daxue chubanbu, 1993), Vol 9. 839.

Western culture and technology. In the novel, there was an episode in which a xiucai of Shanghai was talking about foreign guns to a courtesan. He enumerated very quickly the most recent types of foreign guns and their detailed description, ranging from the American-manufactured Remington rifle to the Mauser semi-automatic pistol. The xiucai then compared these foreign guns in terms of their range, accuracy, and penetration. Scholars who study Zou Tao and his work have suggested that his novel appeared with "copious and explicit connections to the author's life."[67] From the novel, it can be assumed that even an educated elite of the late Qing like Zou Tao had the channel to grasp the knowledge of foreign weapons. As the late Qing government initiated and deepened its military modernization from the 1860s, a growing number of Western works on modern weaponry were translated into Chinese in Shanghai, through which people might learn about modern guns. We have no clue if Zou Tao himself either owned or carried a foreign gun. The episode in the novel attested that a section of population in China started to be intertwined with the global military trend. A few decades later, some Chinese people not only grasped the knowledge of firearms, but also obtained and leaned to use these guns. The introduction of the foreign gun generated social and cultural responses.

During this period, the gun's symbolism of violence was subjected to change in transformative modern period. Its social meaning was not confined to violence and killing. This chapter presents a social and cultural history of guns in China. One non-military individual might arm himself to embrace modernity, or to pursue power for local dominance, or to show his determination to fight against a potential threat. All these symbolisms and uses coexisted and coverged in modern China. In a period when the weak government was not able to provide

[67] Patrick Hanan, *Chinese Fiction of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries: Essays by Patrick Hanan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 24.

protection to its civilians, people empowered themselves through the acquisition of powerful weapons. Unlike the traditional period, when bearing a gun was a monopoly of soldiers and rebels, in the modern period, the action of arming with guns was socially and culturally sanctioned. Nevertheless, this does not mean the government was willing to give up a monopoly on violence. How to regulate gun ownership will be a theme in the next four chapters.

~ CHAPTER TWO ~

Between Social Control and Popular Power:

The Circulation of Private Guns and Control Policies during the mid to late Qing, 1781-1911

Introduction

On February 29, 1908, Shen Jiaben (沈家本 1840-1913), a prominent jurist and legal reformer of the late Qing Dynasty, presented the throne with a draft version of the criminal code called the Current Criminal Law of the Great Qing (大清現行刑律 *Daqing xianxing xinglü*). The new legal code was officially promulgated in 1910, just one year before the overthrow of the Qing court. As a crucial part of the New Policies reform (新政 *xinzheng*, 1901-1911) initiated by the Qing court to revitalize the fragile government after many years of domestic uprising and humiliating foreign invasion, the radical revision of the traditional legal code aimed to build a modern and independent judicial system. One prominent revision that marked a departure from traditional criminal legal practice was the statute on private possession of weapons. Unlike the Great Qing Code (大清律例 *Daqing lüli*), which strictly prohibited most common people from possessing firearms, the new criminal law loosened the state's grip on private firearms, proposing that ordinary individuals be allowed to own either bird guns or foreign guns for self-defense purposes as long as they had their weapons registered.[1]

[1] According to the Great Qing Code, the Qing government permitted three groups of people to carry bird guns. People living in the dangerous mountains and valleys were eligible to own firearm against wild beast; people living along the coast could use gun to protect themselves against pirates; ordinary individuals who lived in Gansu and Shanxi provinces were allowed to use gun because the regions were figured by tense ethnic conflicts. See *The Great Qing Code*, trans. William C. Jones (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 205-06.

For the first time in Chinese history, the criminal code removed settled legal provisions that only those living in remote mountainous and coastal regions could carry firearms, and even then under strict government surveillance. In the draft statute, the state officially loosened harsh restrictions on gun ownership. This radical change indicated judicial reformers of the late Qing adjusted their reform agenda to the new social situation. As Shen Jiaben and his colleagues explained,

> [Right] now most bandits and robbers can obtain guns, and ordinary people are not capable of effectively defending themselves without equally lethal firearms ….Thus, all people should henceforth be permitted to carry foreign guns or bird guns for self-defense.[2]

Bureaucrats of the late Qing were not alone in capturing the reality of social turmoil and preparing to reassess firearm control efforts. After witnessing the increasing rates of armed violence, Hu Xueyan (胡雪岩 1823-1885), a notable businessman of the late Qing, asked "[Wouldn't] it be foolish for the government to stamp out civilians' guns, if it was incapable of banning outlaws or bandits' guns?"[3] Shen Jiaben and Hu Xueyan's recognition of the government's impotence in exercising authority over violence captures a new facet of social reality that has been largely ignored in the existing historiography. In contrast to the High Qing period (1680-1820) when the strong and centralized government had the capacity to secure a monopoly on coercive power, the general social turmoil accompanying the prevalence of private guns in late Qing local society helped shift the government away from clinging to its monopoly on guns.

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[2] Shen Jiaben, *Current Criminal Law of Great Qing* (Current criminal law of the great Qing), *juan* 25: 24.

[3] Hu Xueyan, *Hu Wenzhong quanji* (胡雪岩全集 Complete collection of Hu Xueyan), *juan* 55:3.

The Qing government never launched a national program of firearm registration as many modern states did. The absence of such statistics in the Qing dynasty makes any estimation of the level of firearm dissemination tentative. However, it is clear that as accelerating domestic rebellions, protracted military conflicts, and the process of local militarization dominated the decades of the 1850s and after, the circulation of firearms among non-state actors increased. The Taiping rebellion, arguably the most destructive peasant insurrection in human history to that time, kicked off successive popular uprisings in the late nineteenth century, in which the rebels armed themselves against the Qing troops with a mixture of obsolete Chinese weapons and imported Western firearms against the Qing troops. The chaotic social order, by consequence, led to a proliferation of local militia or other forms of self-defense forces in local society, which acclimated ordinary men (and even some women) to the use of firearms. Village-based militias (團練 *tuanlian*), for instance, organized by local gentry, learned to use modern guns or rifles manufactured by foreign countries against potential threats. The presence of armed militia and individuals, however, failed to make society safer. Local gazetteers and newspapers were still filled with evidence of gun-provoked violence or lurid reports of armed banditry. The diffusion of firearms in local society thus not only deteriorated social and political stability in the late Qing, but also spurred more ordinary people to pursue comparable or more powerful weapons for self-defense. Village elites, too, who had enhanced their status through the holding of degrees, started exercising their power through the procurement of guns in their functions in local defense.[4]

[4] For example, the Qian family of Wuxi City, a great literary elite lineage in the Jiangnan region, wasted little time to purchase foreign guns and trained local people to use them in the early twentieth century. See Jerry Dennerline, *Qian Mu and the World of Seven Mansions* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1988), 71-73.

This chapter traces the dynamic process through which the state adjusted its stance towards private weapon ownership in accordance with the changing social and political reality of the mid to late Qing periods. Previous studies have examined thoroughly both military logistics in the High Qing period and the late Qing's military transformation efforts, with their focus on weapon use in military operations. Nevertheless, the social and political implications of powerful gun ownership by non-state actors remains unclear. As my research proves, the military use of these weapons during the Qing period had been very much interwoven into the broader social fabric, forcing the state to take steps to maintain the monopoly on violence. Shen Jiaben's proposal leads us to ask some important questions about the state's stance over private gun ownership. First, what were continuities and changes of firearm control policies from the mid to the late Qing? Second, how did social ecology, geography, political considerations, and other factors help shape the circulation mechanisms of civilian guns? Third, how did private gun ownership affect the relationship between state and society?

Drawing on both central government documents and local sources, this chapter introduces the manifold ways in which the state was increasingly unable to maintain its monopoly on violence. Its novel approach was to adjust to the new social and political reality. This chapter argues that through most of the Qing period, the private gun's diffusion in local society, to a large extent, was determined by the state's stance between two ideologies: the reliance on social power exercised through a permissive policy towards private gun ownership to defend the localities, and the resolute maintenance of its monopoly on the most advanced weapons. The state's regulation and control over its armed civilians appeared as a dynamic process, hovering between the two ideologies until the end of the Qing dynasty. In several

important ways, the late Qing's shifting policy towards armed civilians also left a legacy to the Republican period.

Regulating Private Weapons before the Age of the Gun

Unlike the modern era, in which explosive small arms were widely circulated, most ordinary people before the late nineteenth century who needed tools to fight, hunt, and protect their property always sought weapons that were made from cold steels and other easily accessible materials. The late Ming official Chen Renxi (陳仁錫 1581-1636), in his *A Compendium of Contemporary Regulations of the Ming Dynasty* (皇明世法錄 *Huang Ming shifa lu*) noted that civilians' weapons included swords, bows and arrows, knives, spears, and cudgels.[5] It is extremely rare to find direct evidence in which armed civilians articulated their motivation for weapon ownership and the channels through which they acquired weapons. What can be arguably addressed here is the social and institutional foundations that made the circulation of cold steel weapons possible in late imperial China.

Those who armed themselves with locally forged weapons did so for both practical and institutional reasons. Practically speaking, the state's exclusive monopoly over the use of violence and force prevented civilians from acquiring sophisticated and advanced weapons, compelling them to seek easily-accessible arms. Successive governments developed a highly centralized and state-controlled mechanism for weapon production. During the Ming dynasty, artisans and their families working in the state-run arsenals were constantly and closely monitored. They were not allowed to leave their work places without governmental permission. Placing these weapon artisans under strict surveillance resulted from the hereditary occupational

[5] Chen Renxi, *Huang Ming shifa lu* (Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1965), vol 44. 13a-13b.

household system (戶籍 *huji*), under which ordinary men and women were primarily categorized into three groups: military (軍籍 *junji*), civilian (民籍 *Minji*), artisan (匠籍 *jiangji*), and saltern (鹽籍 *yanji*). As historians Ray Huang and Wu Han's works have suggested, the restrictions on artisans were the most complicated. They were supposed to be permanently confined to their district of registration, and their sons and close relatives were required to take over their positions.[6] Though the hereditary occupational system was finally abolished in the early eighteenth century, most ordinary people had no means to master weapon-making techniques. The secrecy of arsenal operations kept non-military individuals from obtaining and copying military weapons produced by the state. Meanwhile, it was also hardly possible for them to access the knowhow and expertise to produce these weapons, which were seen as the symbol of the state's coercive power. The methods of crafting sophisticated weapons, especially the explosive firearms, could be found in numerous military texts, such as the *Exploitation of the Works of Nature* (天工開物 *Tiangong Kaiwu*), the *Treatise of Armament Technology* (武備志 *Wubei Zhi*), and the *Essentials of the Military Classics* (武經總要 *Wujing Zongyao*). All the military classics, however, were banned for reading in the Ming. They were ultimately buried when the Qianlong emperor (r. 1736-1796) initiated the compilation of the Complete Library of Four Treasuries (四庫全書 *Siku Quanshu*). In most occasions, the general public had no way to access and even to possess firearms and advanced powerful weapons. It was the state that always played the pioneering and leading role in the efforts at practicing weapon making technology.

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[6] Ray Huang, *Taxation and Governmental Finance in Sixteenth-Century Ming China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 32-33; Wu Han, "Yuan-Ming liangdai zhi jianghu" (元明两代之匠戶 Artisans in the Yuan and Ming dynasties), *Tianjin yishi bao shixue* 天津益世報史學 44 (December 1936).

The state's acquiescence to an armed populace was another reason for the possessing of cold steel weapons. In comparison with firearms, which were subject to harsh regulation by the Ming and Qing governments (which will be discussed below), the state rarely restricted or prohibited civilian possession of primitive and less sophisticated weapons. This is particularly reflected in the Great Ming Code (大明律 *Da Ming lü*):

> In all cases where some persons among the people possess, without authorization, prohibited military equipment such as armor for horses or men, shields, tubes of fire, catapults for throwing fire, banners, and signaling devices, for one such item, they shall be punished by 80 strokes of beating with the heavy stick. For each additional item, the penalty shall be increased one degree more than that for possessing them without authorization…. [The possession or manufacture of] bows and arrows, lances, swords, crossbows, fishing forks, and pitchforks is not prohibited.[7]

According to the Code, the state attempted to make a clear division between "military" and "civilian" weapons. Military equipment (軍器 *junqi*) referred to those lethal arms for regular troop use exclusively, which included both superior cold steels and firearms, while civilian weapons were inferior cold steels and weapons without firepower or firing capability. Under the Code, civilians were allowed to manufacture, circulate and carry a variety of weapons that posed less threat than military weapons.

The different treatments towards the use of military and civilian weapons in the legal provisions, in fact, indicated the state provided some sorts of justification for the civilian possession of cold steel weapons. The prerequisite was that their action of arming themselves would not challenge the state authority. As an excerpt from the *Official History of the Ming Dynasty* (明史 *Mingshi*) illustrates, the Ming government took an armed populace for granted,

[7] The translation comes from *The Great Ming Code/Da Ming lü,* trans. Jiang Yonglin (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 133-134.

and saw civilian mastery of less sophisticated arms as an integral part of regional identity and an effective way to defend the localities:

> Village troops (鄉兵 *xiangbing*) could be conscripted in terms of their specialization to assist the regular troops.... [Many recruited villagers] were adept in using wolf brush (狼筅 *lang xian*) and trident (叉 *cha*). During Chongzhen's reign (1611-1644), village troops from Chuan and Liao [of Zhejiang Province] were widely conscripted to suppress wandering bandits. Besides these recruited strong men, there were also many armed villagers who were not drafted. Peasants in the Song County of Henan Province were good at using *maohulu*, and were good at fighting in mountainous regions. The counties next to Song, including Lushi and Lingbao contained many mines. The owners employed many village braves, who were called *jiao'nao* or *dashou*. Village braves in Shandong were good at using long poles, while people in Xuzhou armed themselves with arrows.... The dart was widely employed in Zhangzhou and Quanzhou, especially in the war at sea. These braves had successfully defeated Japanese pirates during the Zhengtong reign. Those salt merchants organized paramilitary forces, who armed themselves with firearm cannon, powerful crossbow, and cart to fight against bandits.[8]

The reasons for the state's tolerance of the existence of private weapons in society were twofold. First, as discussed above, the primitive and less sophisticated weapons in local society, in the eyes of government officials, could not challenge state military power. Second, the state believed that the armed populace, if properly trained, could constitute an invaluable source of military force when the social security was at stake.

An armed populace was embodied in the practice of local government during the Ming and Qing dynasties. Of the major scholar-officials in the Late Ming, one statesman who strongly advocated arming local villagers was Lü Kun (呂坤 1536-1618), a high ranking official with a

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[8] Zhang Tingyu 張廷玉 et al., *Mingshi* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 91:2252. The Ming founder established the *weisuo* 衛所 system to guard provinces. Each *wei* 衛 or "guards" consisted of a guard unit of 5,600 men, which was then divided into five battalions. As a hereditary system, these *weisuo* armies were scattered along the frontiers and at strategic spots. The system declined starting from the mid-sixteenth century. The state gradually relied on *xiangbing* (village troops) for local defense. As a paramilitary apparatus, the *xiangbing* was formed locally and also subject to state surveillance. See Frederic E. Wakeman, *Telling Chinese History: A Selection of Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 178.

long career in both local and provincial governments in north China provinces and central government.[9] Recognizing the widespread presence of weapons, Lü proposed to take advantage of the armed populace, who would be beneficial to the state's social control. His proposal on the mechanism for local security was explicitly recorded in his *Record of Practical Government* (實證錄 *Shizheng lu*), and revealed a reliance on collective defense that was built upon a neighborhood basis. Lü suggested that

> [A]fter the autumn harvest was gathered in October and before the spring sowing in March, all local adult residents in the village were expected to take their family owned spears, swords, bow and arrows, short cudgels, rope whips and many others to receive military training under guidance of professional instructors to chase bandits and outlaws.[10]

Lü's efforts to exploit the military potential of armed civilians was consistent with the state promotion of the *bao-jia* 保甲 system, a neighborhood-based collective defense mechanism that was adopted from the Song dynasty (960-1279). Once the Ming Empire was consolidated, the *bao-jia* was readily adopted by the Ming rulers, who endowed the system with the new function of mutual surveillance. Under the system, selected peasants were organized into militia units and made to learn the use of arms. These units were headed by the local rural elite and also supervised by the government. The quasi-military organization, appearing as a state-sanctioned militia with local policing functions, as historian Philip Kuhn has argued, was designed to repel

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[9] For a detailed biography about of Lü Kun, see Joanna F. Handlin, *Action in Late Ming Thought: The Reorientation of Lü Kun and Other Scholar-Officials* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

[10] *Lü Kun, Shi Zhenglu* (reprint, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008), 1069.

bandits and outlaws, as well as to strengthen the state's total control over the country through developing collective defense corps.[11]

Another parallel self-defense force that was independent of the *bao-jia* system was the crop-watching association described by Qi Biaojia (祁彪佳 1602-1645), a late Ming playwright and local official. In times of famine, bandits became rampant and widespread crop loss was hard to control. According to Qi, each village organized its police force to guard crops at harvest time. Training in the village, crop-watching militiamen who were armed with cold steels always offered paid service for landowners against bandits. The corps were organized voluntarily by local elites. As historians have painstakingly documented, the Chinese imperial state possessed limited capability for local governance, leaving a power vacuum to be filled by indigenous gentry.[12] The existence of such private armed forces attests to what sociologist Fei Xiaotong (費孝通 1910-2005) claims about China's "two-track politics," in which social forces in various forms had sprouted outside the bureaucracy.[13] Appearing in the form of independent self-defense corps, the crop-watching associations, continued to exist throughout China until the Republican

[11] Philip Kuhn, *Rebellion and its Enemies in Late Imperial China: Militarization and Social Structure, 1796-1864* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), 33.

[12] For a review of Chinese gentry and their local functions, see Joseph W. Esherick and Mary Backus Rankin, "Introduction," in *Chinese Local Elites and Patterns of Dominance*, eds., Joseph W. Esherick and Mary Backus Rankin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 1-26.

[13] Fei Xiaotong, "Zai lun shuanggui zhengzhi" (再論雙軌政治 Restudy the two-track politics), in *Xiangtu chongjian* (鄉土重建 The reestablishment of the countryside) (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1948), 58.

decades (1912-1949), when the collapsing social order required more powerful collective defense forces.[14]

Arming and Disarming: The Issue of the "Bird Gun" before the Late Qing

The Ming-Qing state's authoritarian rule, under which the monarch exercised disciplinary power and empowered ordinary people to defend themselves through individual or collective means were inseparable aspects of the state's social control mechanism. As we have seen, the Ming and Qing governments did not jealously defend their exclusive monopoly on the production and possession of certain types of arms, which were officially defined as "civilian weapons." Allowing law-abiding civilians to be armed with less sophisticated weapon not only would not challenge state authority, but also assisted the state to maintain local order. Maintenance of an effective monopoly of powerful weapons through enforcement of the law against private possession of military weapons and reliance on armed populace for local defense were crucial to the imperial state's control over its territory.

Nevertheless, the model of what I term "control/reliance" began to be challenged when the bird gun was introduced into China and diffused in society. Under this model, the state rarely took serious efforts to measure the degree of civilian weapon ownership. State intervention in the possession of private weapons happened only when offenders used lethal arms to conduct crimes or rebellious activities. However, with the diffusion of the bird guns, the government consciously tightened its control over civilian weapons, taking deliberate measures to minimize the potential

[14] Qi Biaojia, *Qi Biaojia ji* 祁彪佳集 (The Collection of Qi Biaojia) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 122-26. Also see Kuhn, *Rebellion and Its Enemies in Late Imperial China,*33-34; Jerry Dennerline, "Hsu Tu and the Lesson of Nanking: Political Integration and the Local Defense in Chiang-nan, 1634-1645," in *From Ming to Qing: Conquest, Region, and Continuity in Seventeenth-Century China*, eds., Jonathan D. Spence and John E. Wills, Jr. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 111-13.

threat to political stability brought about by the large numbers of unregulated guns in society, whose prowess equaled or even exceeded those of military weapons.

The Diffusion of the Matchlock Gun into Chinese Society

The matchlock gun's arrival in China can be dated to the Jiajing 嘉靖 period (r. 1521-1567) of the Ming dynasty.[15] When the exotic weapon crossed the sea, Chinese gave this black-powder muzzle-loading matchlock weapon a special name, the "bird gun" or "fowling piece" (鳥槍 *niaoqiang*).[16] As many military historians writing from a global perspective have suggested, the introduction of guns and other firearms indicate that China was never insulated from Western

[15] During this period, China's southeastern coast was constantly plagued by hordes of Japanese pirates. The Ming writer Lang Ying (郎瑛 1486-1566) in his compendium the *Classified Essays Seven Times Revised* (七修類稿 *Qixiu leigao*) speculated that the matchlock was probably introduced into China by these Japanese armed pirates, who were arrested in Zhejiang province and then instructed local arsenal artisans to manufacture the gun. A contemporary Japanese source by Minamiura Fumi recorded that the Japanese learned the craft in manufacturing matchlock from Portuguese travelers in the year of 1544, who landed off the coast of Tanegashima, an island to the south of Kyushu, with a purpose to conduct formal trade with Japan. For the introduction of matchlock into China, see Lang Ying, *Qixiu leigao* (reprint, Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1963), 18:228. For a systematic study of the Japanese piracy during this period, see Kwan-wai So, *Japanese piracy in Ming China during the 16th century* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1975). According to So, many of these pirates or known as *wokou* were southern coastal Chinese, joined by some Japanese. He argues that one major reason of piracy was the population pressure during the Ming dynasty. Recent study by Gang Zhao also highlights the advent of the Europeans in the formation of piracy. See Gang Zhao, *The Qing Opening to the Ocean: Chinese Maritime Policies, 1684-1757* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2013).

[16] See F. Mayers, "On the Introduction and Use of Gunpowder and Firearms among the Chinese," *Journal of the North China Branch Royal Asiatic Society,* 6 (1871), 93-103.

military technology when the "Military Revolution" was initiated in the sixteenth century.[17] Although the introduction of firearms had radically transformed the way of fighting, the matchlock or bird gun was never adopted as the predominant weapon on the battlefield before the late nineteenth century. The primary reason lay in technological restraint in the Chinese

[17] For the Military Revolution Theory, see Geoffrey Parker, *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Nevertheless, Parker's Military Revolution Theory is not without critics. First, Parker's Eurocentric argument positing the Military Revolution started in Europe was challenged by a group of China historians, who regard the use of matchlock firearms and cannons by the early Ming military force, at least one century earlier than Europe, as the inauguration of Military Revolution. Sun Laicheng has persuasively identified the Ming China as the first gunpowder empire in the early modern world and primary transmitter of military technology to Southeast Asia. See Sun Laicheng, "Ming-Southeast Asian Overland Interactions, 1368-1644," PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 2000. Second, the success of the European imperial expansion overseas before 1800s have also prompted Parker and other historians of the time, to be convinced about the absolute superiority of Western military technology. Since then, this view sparks intense debate among military historians who assert the military-technological gap between the West and East, China in particular, was not huge and easily made up before the 18th century. While acknowledging China had lagged far behind European nations and adopted European guns substantially after the sixteenth century, the Chinese Military Revolution School argue that China's strong technological foundation facilitated the adoption of European arms, and later came up new designs that were in many respects more advanced than the West. See Kenneth M. Swope, "Crouching Tigers, Secret Weapons: Military Technology Employed during the Sino-Japanese-Korean War, 1592-1598," *Journal of Military History*, no.1 (2005): 11-42.

context.[18] During the Qing dynasty, the state's hesitation over the adoption of bird guns for military use was also contingent on cultural and logistical factors.[19] Although the Qing imperial state engaged in a consistent effort to strengthen its military establishment, due to the bird gun's high manufacturing cost and inherent shortcomings, the new weapon remained subordinate to the cold steel arms in military practice until the late nineteenth century. As one Japanese general staff estimated at the end of the 1890s, only three-fifths of the Green Standard soldiers were armed with bird guns, whose casting technique would date back to the Ming Dynasty, while the

[18] When the gun first landed China, the weapon, owing to its portability and long range accuracy was readily recognized by the renowned Ming general and strategist Qi Jiguang (戚繼光 1528-1587). In his military manual *Miscellaneous Records* (練兵實記 *Lianbing Shiji*), Qi exclaimed that "the newly imported matchlock, serving as a supplement to the conventional weapons, would improve the Ming's military capabilities." However, as Ray Huang points out, the Ming military did not apply the alien weapon effectively on the battlefield due to the lack of a unified logistics system and substantial support from local officials. The second reason ascribed to the ineffective use of the musket was the nature of the military challenges that Chinese armies encountered. In comparison with bird guns and other light arms, Chinese warriors favored cannons because they always loomed large in siege warfare. Chinese towns and cities were always surrounded by high and strong walls and moats, which were designed not only to mark the boundaries of administrative units, but also assumed the function of protecting the residents against invaders. In comparison, the bird gun has its shortcomings, which were in particular embodied in its loading time and accuracy on horseback. Late Ming military theorist Zhao Shizhen (趙士楨 1554-1661), in his Treatise on Firearms and Their Use with Illustrations (神器譜 *Shenqi Pu*), informed us that "muskets are effective on wagons, on boats, and on foot, but it was impossible to ensure accuracy on horseback." The complicated firing mechanism also kept soldiers from loading quickly. The bird gun held a burning or slow match in a clamp on the end of the curved arm known as the serpentine. To fire the gun, one had to pull the end of the serpentine, which then ignite the priming powder in a flash-pan, which engendered flame travelling through the main propellant charge. This ignition system, though had revolutionized the manufacturing technology of modern weapons, had many obvious flaws– wind and rain could extinguish the match or disperse the priming powder away from the pan. Qi Jiguang, an enthusiast of bird gun, also could not help but recognize its drawbacks. In practice, he did not dare to arm his soldiers with bird guns extensively, but regarded them as supplements to other weapons. See Qi Jiguang, *Lianbing shiji*, in *Zhongguo bingshu jicheng* 中國兵書集成 (Collections of Chinese military books) (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 1994), vol. 19, 644; Ray Huang, *1587, A Year of No Significance: The Ming Dynasty in Decline* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 170-71.

rest still used spears or swords.[20] The state's indifference towards small arms affected the degree of its circulation in society. Without mastering the production technique of advanced weapons, civilians' attempts to upgrade their weapons seemed impossible.

Evidence of banditry, insurgency, and other forms of rebellious activities are indispensable to measure the spread of arms among the population. Such armed activities consistently drew official attention, which therefore made then part of the historical record.

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[19] Achieving competency in shooting a bow and arrow, like the hairstyle of Manchu males and Manchu language, appeared as one of the major means of preserving Manchu ethnic identity. The firm adherence to the cultural tradition, in turn, hindered the extensive use of bird guns among the elite Manchu cavalry forces. The Manchus, once the semi-nomads and warlike people scattered beyond the Great Wall, similar with the Ming warriors, did not fully integrate the bird gun within its military apparatus, nor did the Qing engage in developing small arms technology. The primary military forces of the Qing army were the Eight Banners, which, as the emperor's hereditary military units, played a central part in consolidating the Qing power and maintaining the Manchu identity. Even though musketry became an established part of military training for Banner garrisons from the early Qing dynasty, archery's predominant position had not been shaken, as the early Qing emperors saw horsemanship and archery as essential in preserving and consolidating a distinct Manchu cultural identity. The Yongzheng 雍正 emperor (r. 1723-1735) more than once commanded that the Manchu banners should not allow their archery skills to languish. Besides the Banner troops, the Qing also created the all-Chinese Green Standard Army, the central body of regular troop dispersed throughout the empire to police the interior provinces. Unlike some of the elite Manchu cavalry forces, the Green Standard Army soldiers were given the rights to bear bird guns during the Yongzheng period. Although bird guns were adopted in warfare and routine drills, the weapon was not elevated to a predominant role in military practice. In the second Jinchuan campaign 第二次金川戦役 (1771-1776), one of the vainglorious Emperor Qianlong's self-proclaimed "Ten Complete Military Victories" (十全武功 *shi quan wu gong*), only 3,574 bird guns were forged by the imperial state, while the amount of normal arrows was 478,500. For the Eight Banners and Manchu identity, see Mark C. Elliot, *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001). For Yongzheng emperor's view on musketry, see Zhao Er'xun 趙爾巽, et al., *Qingshi Gao* 清史稿 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1928), *juan* 130, 422. For the use of bird guns in the second Jinchuan campaign, see Ulrich Theobald, *War Finance and Logistics in Late Imperial China: A Study of the Second Jinchuan Campaign (1771-1776)* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013), 77-83.

[20] Ralph L. Powell, *The Rise of Chinese Military Power, 1895-1912* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), 39.

Evidence also shows that these restless individuals and groups were always at pains to acquire the most advanced weapons for their violent ends. Nevertheless, many criminal cases and rebellion records suggest that the qualitative gap in weapon technologies between the Qing troops and rebels in local society was still insurmountable. During the Qing dynasty, bird guns and other firearms were not common among outlaws, bandits, and rebels as they were in the modern period. For example, the *Conspectus of Penal Cases* (刑案會典 *Xing'an huilan*), the largest collection of Qing criminal cases serving as legal guide for local magistrates, involved few bird gun homicide cases before the nineteenth century. Criminals always used swords, knives, daggers, and other nonexplosive weapons.[21] The Lin Shuangwen Uprising (林爽文起義 1786-1788) was another prime example to look into how the rebel force, which was composed largely of Ming loyalists and peasants, equipped the rebel army against Qing troops. In the early 1780s, Lin joined the Heaven and Earth Society (天地會 *tiandihui*), which was characterized as both a secretive folk religious sect and a criminal organization in Taiwan.[22] Within a short time, the secret society, organized by Lin grew to some 50,000 men, many of whom were former Ming loyalists, peasants (mostly unattached single men), and local bullies.[23] In 1786, Lin's followers with anti-Qing resentments started a rebellion and occupied most of Taiwan within a short time period. However, these insurgents were quickly suppressed by the government in 1786, mainly owing to the Qing's well equipped and disciplined troops. According to a memorial presented by

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[21] See Zhu Qingqi 朱慶琪 ed. *Xing'an Huilan sabian* (Beijing: Beijing guji chubanshe, 2000).

[22] Dian Murray, *The Origin of the Tiandihui: The Chinese Triads in Legend and History,* in collaboration with Qin Baoqi, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

[23] David Ownby, "Chinese Hui and the Early Modern Social Order: Evidence from Eighteenth-Century Southeast China," in *"Secret Societies" Reconsidered: Perspectives on the Social History of Modern South China and Southeast Asia*, ed. Robert J. Antony (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), 52-3.

Li Shiyao (李世堯 ?- 1788), the governor-general of Fujian and Zhejiang, the government deployed 8,468 bird guns and many other weapons for the suppression.[24] In comparison, the insurgents were mostly armed with swords, knives, arrows, and spears. Although some of them obtained bird guns and other firearms, these weapons were in short supply for fighting against well-equipped Qing armies. These armed rebels, though ferocious and militaristic in nature, did not shift away the state monopoly on advanced weapons.

There are both institutional and social reasons that affected the bird gun's relatively low degree of circulation before the late nineteenth century. The foremost reason for bird gun's relatively low degree of circulation at the time certainly lies in the restrictive bird gun control policies. Although bird guns were marginally useful in military campaigns, their greater lethality than primitive cold steel weapons made the government suspicious over the use of them by non-military individuals. In the meantime, the diffusion of bird guns in society before the late nineteenth century was highly uneven, dependent on local conditions and the accessibility of bird gun sources. This was particularly true in some regions where outlaws were less rampant, and civilians' armed self-defense was less needed. In such areas, gun-related cases rarely appeared in the local magistrate's archives. As Susan Naquin in her research on eighteenth- century Shandong has suggested, the ordinary people's indifference towards powerful weapons was due partially to "the existence of the civil order [in eighteenth- century China] that made self-defense unnecessary."[25] Naquin's argument may have been valid in North China or prosperous Jiangnan

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[24] Zhongguo Renmin Daxue Qing shi Yanjiusuo 中國人民大學清史研究, *Tiandihui* 天地會 (The Heaven and Earth Society), vol. 3 (Beijing: Renmin daxue chubanshe, 1980), 51.

[25] Susan Naquin, *Shantung Rebellion: The Wang Lun Uprising of 1774* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 24.

regions, which, according to William Skinner, were garrisoned well by the Green Standard soldiers.[26]

This view, however, naturally tends to minimize regional differences, assuming an unconditional judgment that bird gun ownership was not common elsewhere. Depending on geographic location and social conditions, regions differed greatly in how readily the bird gun circulated among civilians during most of the Ming and Qing dynasties. Considerable empirical evidence suggests that the carrying of bird guns was by no means a marginal activity to ordinary people in violence-prone regions. Rather, the use of the bird gun became an integral part of local social life in some coastal provinces. In such areas where gentry activity was either weak or absent and the state was unable to provide sufficient support, ordinary people were more likely to own firearms, especially the bird guns to protect themselves from becoming victims of banditry. William Rowe's recent research on Macheng 麻城, a county in northeastern Hubei province which was notorious for endemic banditry, reveals that bird guns appeared among civilians in large numbers at least during the seventeenth century.[27] The use of bird guns was also continuously reported in many feud-afflicted areas of coastal provinces. For example, owing to scarce resources, expanding population, and unstable social ecology, constant lineage feuding became endemic in Fujian and Guangdong provinces. Zhang Jixin (張集馨 1800-1878), the

[26] William G. Skinner, "Social Ecology and the Forces of Repression in North China: A Regional-Systems Framework for Analysis," Unpublished paper, 1979.

[27] William Rowe, *Crimson Rain, Seven Centuries of Violence in a Chinese County* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 338. According to Rowe, the bird gun's diffusion to the Macheng region was probably affected by local people who served in the military service and learned the gun crafting technique.

prefect of Tingzhanglong 汀漳龍 in Fujian province, noted in 1842 that bird guns had been widely used in lineage feud strife in southern Fujian for years.[28]

As we can see, people living along the Southeast Coast and borderland areas had encountered the bird gun earlier than those living in other areas. Bird gun users before the late Qing were mostly anonymous peasants, who armed themselves for hunting, self-defense, or even committing violence. Clues about the civilians' use of firearms can be obtained from contemporary eyewitness descriptions. The famous Cantonese scholar Qu Dajun (屈大均 1630-1696), writing in the early Qing dynasty, noted that "bird guns were commonly found in Guangdong. In the hill areas, men learned to use them from the age of ten, and Xinhui County was known for making them."[29] Existing related documents did not uncover how Guangdong people came to learn the gun technique originally. What has been confirmed is that by Qu's time, southern Guangdong, in comparison with other Chinese regions, had more opportunities to come into contact with the outside world, given its geographic adjacency to Macau, which had been under Portuguese control since the mid-sixteenth century. Thereafter, Macau not only displayed its pivotal position as the hub of Asian trade before the late Qing, but also served as a conduit

[28] Zhang Jixin, *Dao Xian huanhai jianwenlu* 道咸宦海見聞錄 (Officials' working documents during the Daoguan and Xiafeng's reigns) (Beijing: Zhonghuashuju, 1981), *juan* 91, 94-95.

[29] Qu Dajun, *Guangdong Xinyu* 廣東新語 (New words on Guangdong) (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1998), 441.

through which some Chinese people living in the Pearl River Delta could witness product innovation in the West, including cannon and quick-firing guns. [30]

When the Portuguese arrived in China in the early sixteenth century they were armed with matchlocks. In his detailed analysis of Macau's fortification and weapons, historian Richard Garrett finds that frequent coastal attack from pirates offered the Portuguese settlers a great incentive for the development of firearms in Macau, which later became an important source of armament to Japan, China, and other countries in Southeastern Asia.[31] Portuguese adventurer Antonio Fialho Fereira, who travelled to Macau in 1640, noted that "a great quantity of powder, many matchlocks, and arquebuses, which likewise made there, and are sold very cheaply albeit that they are amongst the best in the world."[32]

[30] Portuguese adventurer Antonio Fialho Fereira, who travelled to Macau in 1640, noted that "a great quantity of powder, many matchlocks, and arquebuses, which likewise made there, and are sold very cheaply albeit that they are amongst the best in the world." See Richard J. Garrett, *The Defences of Macau: Forts, Ships and Weapons over 450 years* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010); Zhidong Hao. *Macau History and Society* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011).

[31] Ibid.

[32] Garrett, *The Defences of Macau*, 176. Matchlocks and arquebuses were named bird guns in Chinese context.

Figure 8: Macau in China. SOURCE: https://depts.washington.edu/chinaciv/timeline.htm#maps.

Macau's role as the primary source of foreign armament had been consistently in place until the mid-nineteenth century. Firearm trafficking and gunrunning in Macau along with their impact on social order, despite appearing sporadically, always elicited a great deal of official attention during the Qing dynasty. In the ninth year of his reign (1804), the Jiaqing 嘉慶 emperor (r. 1796-1820) issued an edict to the Macau sub-prefectural magistrate on the prevalence of firearm trafficking from Macau to Guangdong. The emperor complained that "contraband trade flourished in Macau. Profit-driven barbarians from the West in Macau sold saltpeter, sulfur, and military weapons openly without checking their clients' identity. Firearms falling into the hands of civilians seemed inevitable."[33] Recognizing rebels and bandits might arm themselves with contraband weapons, the Jiaqing emperor urged local magistrates to interrogate Chinese buyers seriously, if caught, about the origins and use of their firearms. To uphold social order, he also

[33] Garrett, *The Defences of Macau*, 20.

required local officials to submit annual reports with respect to any firearm-involved incidents in Macau and surrounding vicinity.

The Jiaqing emperor was hardly the first statesman who voiced complaints about the illicit firearm trade. Five years later, a similar complaint came from Peng Zhaoshun (彭兆順 1758-?), the Magistrate of Xiangshan 香山 County, who was famous for stamping out pirates activities along the Guangdong coast during the Qianlong-Jiaqing period.[34] In his memorials and private writings, Peng had more than once expressed the frustration with the uncontrollable gun-running activities that led to a general breakdown in public order. Although the Qing government enacted strict firearm laws to ban non-military people from owning and distributing firearms of any kinds, officials quickly found their efforts at stamping out gun trafficking were undermined by manufacturers and dealers in Macau, who were free of central control, owing much to the pluralistic polity, and by Guangdong civilians with powerful desire of arming themselves for violent purposes. After the Portuguese established a settlement on the Macau peninsula in 1557, the Chinese government rarely claimed jurisdiction over the territory and inhabitants of the islands. Recent research by Par Cassel suggests that the Qing government only claimed jurisdiction "in cases where Chinese had been killed by foreigners."[35] Such a pluralistic legal order prevented Chinese governments from suppressing gun-running activities in foreign settlements, through which foreign weapons found their way into Chinese coastal regions.

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[34] Ibid., 451.

[35] Par Kristoffer Cassel, *Grounds of Judgement: Extraterritoriality and Imperial Power in Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 42.

Nor were bird guns in China ever exclusively smuggled from Macau and other coastal areas. Rather, private guns scattered in societies for the most part were locally produced.[36] The bird gun became a favored weapon in some violence prone regions because it was relatively easy to make without less sophisticated techniques. In a period marked by "esteeming literacy while despising martiality" (重文輕武 *zhong wen qing wu*), bird gun owners were traditionally either illiterate or semi-literate, including hunters, peasants, or other outlaws. It can be assumed that the construction method was not complicated, and could be transmitted through oral narratives. Given what has been addressed about the government's monopoly on the manufacture of any types of firearms, it remains unknown in what exact ways the details of bird gun technology got diffused. As suggested above, the Ming government carried out the "status system" strictly, under which the artisans in state arsenals were constantly and closely monitored. The system became loose after the sixteenth century, and was ultimately abolished by the Yongzheng emperor to establish a society with "commoner equality."[37] It can be assumed that those artisans, who mastered the skill of producing bird guns in state arsenals, were no longer treated as slaves during the Qing period. One criminal case filed in the *Xingan huilan*, reveals that Wang Si, a native inhabitant of Beijing, worked for an iron shop to manufacture bird guns for the state arsenal. He took this occasion to sell numerous bird guns to his neighbors and instructed them to make firearms privately.[38] Once these artisans were no longer under tight control, as Wang Si's case shows, it was entirely possible that these artisans transmitted gun making techniques. By the

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[36] This is a universal phenomenon. One example was the Malay people. See Peter Boomgaard, *Frontiers of Fears: Tigers and People in the Malay World, 1600-1950* (New Haven: Yale Univesity Press, 2001), 134.

[37] Philip A Kuhn, *Soulstealers: The Chinese Sorcery Scare of 1768* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 34.

[38] Zhu Qingqi, *Xingan huilan*, 225.

end of the nineteenth century, the bird gun was not regarded as an exotic import, but rather a weapon that could be forged indigenously, though its diffusion was not prevalent nationwide.

Disarming Civilians: Bird Gun Control during the Qing Dynasty

As addressed above, the Ming government did not place severe restraints on the civilian possession of cold steel weapons, mainly because the state had the capability, resources, and confidence in maintaining its monopoly on power and violence. In its legal code, the Ming government did not enact any statutory provision to prohibit or limit possession of guns. This was probably because the relatively low degree of bird gun circulation was not worthy of political attention. However, the state's policy towards civilian possession of arms, especially bird guns, began to move to another direction during the Qing period. Alarmed by the bird gun's lethal power and its potential to impair central authority, the Qing rulers in the mid-nineteenth century moved to strengthen the regulations regarding the bird gun's use and circulation. As this section will show, the state's attitude towards private possession of bird gun was by no means static, but was a dynamic process, which was contingent on the social situation and political deliberations.

As aliens, the Qing emperors were deeply distrustful of Han Chinese, which prompted them to ensure that elite Manchu forces had better weapons than Chinese soldiers and populace. During the Qing period, the type of gun that qualified individuals carried was determined by their political status. The Qing emperors were by no means insulated from the changes in gun technology initiated in the West.[39] In the early seventeenth century, a more advanced musket with flintlock mechanism was invented, transforming the traditional matchlock musket which

[39] See Joanna Waley-Cohen, *The Sextants of Beijing: Global Currents in Chinese History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1999), 117-21.

employed a flammable wick to ignite the powder. The flintlock musket arrived in China first and foremost as a gift from Western travelers or foreign envoys. As suggested by the Qing's royal collections, the Qing emperors, being aware of the rapid development of gun technology in Western Europe, deliberately maintained the use of flintlock muskets for royal use exclusively. The most advanced guns were labeled as "for imperial use (御用 yuyong)" indicating these guns were reserved for the exclusive use of the emperor. [40]

With respect to the guns for military use, the allocation was highly hierarchical. Recent work by Ulrich Theobald and Yingcong Dai on the Qing's war expenditure and logistics suggest that the eight banner garrisons which were stationed at the capital were allowed to be armed with the most advanced bird guns to guard the emperor and his noble family. What followed were other Manchu banner soldiers scattered among local provinces, who armed with less powerful guns. The last category was the Green Standard Troops, who were poorly equipped with obsolete matchlocks.[41] Though skill in archery remained an essential part of Manchu identity, as addressed above, they still made efforts to retain their exclusive rights over the most sophisticated and developed military equipment.

Just as with the cautious policy on military use of bird guns in military use, the control of bird guns among civilians became an inseparable aspect of Manchu rulership that guaranteed its legitimate power over Chinese subjects. The Qing rulers, for the most part, granted people the right to arm themselves with civilian weapons. Nevertheless, the definition of "civilian weapon"

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[40] For a list of the flintlock muskets collected by the Qing emperors, see http://www.dpm.org.cn/search/shuziziliaoguan/cangpin/common/search.html?A.objName%20like%27%25%E6%9E%AA%25%27%20.

[41] Theobald, *War Finance and Logistics in Late Imperial China,* 44; Yingcong Dai, "Military Finance of the High Qing Period: An Overview," in *Military Culture in Imperial China,* ed. Nicola di Cosmo (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 306.

during the Qing changed over time. As the Manchus entered the Great Wall in 1644 and settled down in China proper, the alien rulers learned the lessons passed down by the Ming dynasty. Having witnessed the rise of a highly-militarized population in the areas like the northwest, where armed peasants on many occasions joined rebel armies, the early Qing rulers soon banned any non-military individuals from possessing weapons.[42] In 1648, the Board of War ordered the local magistrate to confiscate all manner of weapons owned by peasants. In the meantime, the state placed people under surveillance with the adoption of the *bao-jia* system. Under the community-based system, village residents were under tight administrative control. The chief of each *bao* unit was responsible for reporting any private weapons to local government in his jurisdiction.[43]

The early Qing policy with respect to private arms reflected the anxieties of alien conquerors especially when their attempts to establish solid control could be hindered by a highly militarized population. The policy did not last long, as less than a year later it had been replaced by a new order, requiring local magistrates to return all the confiscated weapons to their owners and also ensure their rights to possess them.

> Recently we have heard that the people have no weapons and cannot repel aggressors. Bandits on the other hand can profit, and the good people have to endure bitter and poisonous [misfortunes]. Now we think that the weapons and armor which the people originally ought not to have had, and which were strictly forbidden in the past, such as muskets, fowling pieces, bows and arrows, knives, spears, and horses, ought now to be

[42] For the Local militarization of the late Ming dynasty, see Roger V. Des Forges, *Cultural Centrality and Political Change in Chinese History: Northeast Henan in the Fall of the Ming* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

[43] *Wenxian congbian* (文獻叢編 Historical documents), vol. 23 (Beijing: Beijing tushuguan chubanshe, 2008), 485.

retained in their possession and not forbidden. Return to their original owners those [weapons] which were initially turned over to the officials.[44]

This imperial edict issued in the sixth year of Shunzhi's 順治 reign (1644-1661) indicated the state's stance over private procession of weapons changed greatly from what it had envisioned. One striking difference was the Qing government's definition of civilian weapons, which included not only cold steel weapons as formulated during the Ming period, but also bird guns. The order also distinguished the "good people," from "bandits." The former group, which belonged to the *bao-jia* units were again granted the right to own guns for self-defense.

Thereafter, the state did not place any particular restriction on the proper use of the bird guns, but regarded putting some kinds of weapons in the hands of peasants as a potential way to guard the localities against bandits and potential rebels. Huang Liuhong 黃六鴻, a district magistrate of the early Qing and the author of the *Complete Book of Happiness and Benevolence* (福惠全書 *Fuhui quanshu*), the largest magistrate handbook in existence, advocated the arming of peasants for local defense. In his book, Huang urged that village braves' important role in guarding localities would be strengthened by instructing them to shoot with bird guns.[45] Though the bird guns were not widely diffused among these village braves, who were still primarily armed with cold steel weapons, Huang's suggestion indicated that arming qualified individuals in local society with bird guns was permitted at least in the early Qing.

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[44] *Shizu shilu* 順治實錄 (Veritable Records of Shunzhi emperor), *juan* 43: 505a. For the translation of this edict, see Frederic Wakeman, *The Great Enterprise: The Manchu Reconstruction of Imperial Order in Seventeenth-Century China*, vol. 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

[45] Huang Liuhong, *Fuhui Quanshu*, in *Guanzhen shujicheng* 官箴書集成 (Compendium of Administrative Handbooks), vol. 3 (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 1997), 135.

Huang's stance rested on two assumptions. First, when local peasants armed themselves with bird guns, they had the power to deter or fight against bandits, whose weapons were much weaker. Second, these peasants who received proper military training would not join the bandits against the state and disturbed local communities. These two assumptions, however, became the Qianlong emperor's major worries decades later. This is shown in an edict issued by him in 1777. In this year, Guotai (郭泰 ? -1872) , the governor of Shandong province and one of Qianlong's most favored officials, presented a memorial to the emperor, requesting approval to train village braves with bird gun shooting for collective defense. Qianlong rejected his request by arguing that

> The village braves were used to arrest robbers and bandits, and guard local barns. They were supposed to assist regular troops and played similar roles. However, they were ordinary peasants, and possessed many different characters from soldiers. If they became skilled at shooting with bird guns, and then conducted illegal activities, that would be disastrous for local society.... For instance, if Wang Lun and his followers mastered bird guns, we would not suppress them so easily. [46]

The same year that Guotai sent his memorial, Gao Jin (高晉 1706-1779), the governor-general of Liangjiang (covering the provinces of Jiangsu, Jiangxi, and Anhui), put forth his proposal to the emperor that the imperial military examination should be revised to examine candidates on bird guns, which would be more pragmatic than swinging swords.[47] Qianlong was enraged and firmly rejected his idea. Fearful that village braves with bird guns in their hands might endanger local security and be harder to suppress, Qianlong once again ordered his

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[46] *Gaozong Shilu* 高宗實錄 (Veritable Records of Qianlong emperor), *juan* 1727, fol: 23a-23b.

[47] Gugong Bowuyuan 故宮博物院, comp. *Gongzhongdang Qianlong chao zouzhe* 宮中檔乾隆朝奏摺 (Palace memorials of Qianlong reign), vol. 72 (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1982), 438.

provincial officials to replace the existing firearms with bows and arrows. The emperor sharply denounced Gao Jin for his ignorance of the bird gun's potential risk:

> If bird gun shooting becomes a component of military examinations, military talents will practice shooting frequently, which might give rise to the illicit production and trafficking of gunpowder and lead shot. Both are contraband in society. The growing number of ordinary people who are capable of shooting in a single county will undoubtedly generate a great deal of influence over local society.[48]

Why did the Qianlong emperor issue an order radically departing from the policy adopted by the Shunzhi Emperor, who regarded arming the common people as an effective way to repel bandits? The Wang Lun rebellion, as Qianlong mentioned in his 1777 edict, made the emperor reassess Qing policy on the use of bird guns by peasants. Wang Lun was the leader of the White Lotus in Shandong Province. As a sect master skilled in meditating and healing, he quickly gathered several thousand followers and rebelled in 1774, to create a religious community. After successfully occupying several cities in Shandong province, the insurgents were suppressed by the well-equipped Qing defenses within a month.[49] General Shuhede (舒赫德 1710-1777), who was in charge of the suppression, wrote a memorial to Qianlong:

> The quick suppression of the Wang Lun Uprising not only benefited from the brave and skillful warriors in the battle, but was also due to the factor that insurgents were poorly equipped. Most of them were not armed with bird guns. It thus could be argued that the possession of bird guns mattered a lot and deserved our attention. If we do not take steps to prohibit these private guns, I am worried it may incur serious influence in the future. I think all the merchants and peasants should not be allowed to own guns. Local magistrates should confiscate all the bird guns in their jurisdictions…. In so doing, there will be no illegal bird guns in local society, which will avoid rebellious activities in a long run. [50]

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[48] *Gaozong Shilu, juan* 1144.

[49] For a detailed analysis of the Wang Lun rebellion, see Naquin, *Shantung Rebellion.*

[50] *Qianlong chao hanwen zhupi zouzhe* 乾隆朝漢文朱批奏摺 (Imperial edicts of the Qianlong emperor), Catalogue no. 555/10-24, First Historical Archives, Beijing.

Shuhede in his edict presented his anxiety over the potential threat posed by the bird gun owners in local society. In 1781, the forty-sixth year of Qianlong's reign, the emperor approved Shuhede's suggestion and issued an imperial edict forbidding the private manufacture of bird guns. He proclaimed that:

> The private manufacture of bird guns in local society has always been a prohibited behavior for ordinary civilians. Provincial Commanders (*dufu*), however, did not take this issue into serious consideration in their daily affairs, leading to the emergence of this phenomenon. As a result, some outlaws might take this occasion to conduct illegal activities, rather than using guns for self-defense purpose or weeding out the wicked criminals. Thus, I order all provincial commanders to investigate this issue in your jurisdiction to guarantee that no artisans manufactures or sells bird guns. If private possession of bird guns is detected, their guns should be confiscated. Provincial commanders also need to report all the cases to the emperor annually.[51]

Qianlong's edict shows his genuine concern over the prevalence and ready availability of bird guns in local society and their threat to public security. The year after Qianlong issued the edict, provincial commanders continuously sent memorials to the emperor, reporting how the bird gun regulation policy was implemented, regardless of whether any private guns were detected in their respective jurisdiction. For the most part, local magistrates always asked the chief of each *bao-jia* unit to report any bird guns found in their jurisdictions. For the confiscated bird guns, local government would pay a minimum amount of money to their owners. They also notified local artisans that making bird guns was prohibited. According to the annual statistics reported by provincial governors through the palace memorial system, more than forty-four

[51] *Qing Gaozong Shilu, juan* 11: 44.

thousand bird guns were confiscated from the forty-sixth year to fifty-ninetieth year of Qianlong's reign. [52]

Provinces	Amounts of Confiscated Guns	Year
Sichuan	16,987	1782-1792
Jiangxi	14,500	1782-1793
Fujian	4500	1782-1792
Yunnan	927	1782-1783
Shaanxi	800	1782-1786
Henan	40	1782-1793
Hunan	100	1782-1793
Guizhou	2,100	1782-1784
Hubei	350	1781-1792
Zhili	120	1782-1787

Table 1: The Confiscation of Bird Guns (1781-1787)

Under Qianlong's order, the ordinary people were deprived of the right to self-defense with bird guns. The early Qing's effective gun control policy depended on distinguishing between "good people" and "bandits," and between "civilian weapons" and "military weapons." Under the *bao-jia* system, the "good people" were permitted to own "civilian weapons,"

[52] I have collected and read these annual reports, which included the amounts of bird guns that local government confiscated from 1782 to 1787. The statistics is based on the information provided by provincial governors. Historian Zuo Buqing also includes the figure in the research on Qianlong's local control mechanism. See Zuo Buqing, "Qianlong zhenya wanglun qiyihou de fangmin cuoshi 乾隆鎮壓王倫起義后的防民措施 (Qianlong emperor's policy on suppressing peasant rebellion)," *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 故宫博物院院刊 (Palace Museum Journal) 2(1982): 29-69.

including bird guns, for self-defense. The Wang Lun Uprising set off an alarm about the danger of the existence of an armed populace in local society. The 1781 edict on bird gun control not only indicated the government's firm intent to guard its monopoly on the production and distribution of powerful weapons, but also reflected the rulers' anxiety when encountering a militarized population who had potential against his legitimate control.

The Introduction of Foreign Guns in the Late Qing

While the number of bird guns in circulation appeared moderate during Qianlong's reign, authorities still banned civilian gun ownership to prevent popular insurgent movements. Until the early twentieth century, the Qing government had no intent to mitigate the prohibition. The strict control measure had, to some extent, limited firearm ownership before the late nineteenth century. The state's indifference towards the application of advanced firearms in the military also circumscribed ordinary people's opportunities to upgrade their weapons.

Even in Guangdong, for example, where a militarized society was being formed, local militia and peasants still used a mixture of cold steels and antiquated bird guns up to the mid-nineteenth century. When the British troops attacked Guangdong in May 1841, local peasants in Sanyuanli 三元里, a market town near the port city, displayed resolute determination and bravery to resist the invasion of the imperialists. A contemporary account by Lin Fuxiang (林福祥 ?-1862), a local gentryman who recruited villagers to defend the town, revealed that ordinary men and women largely turned iron agricultural tools such as swords, axes, plowshares, and hoes

into weapons.[53] Concerning the firearms, as a British military officer noted with contempt, only a slight number of less accurate matchlocks could be found among Chinese villagers.[54]

However, the balance between state power and popular force was destabilized and ultimately toppled from the late nineteenth century when the Qing dynasty entered a period of decline. As China suffered from both Western imperialist penetration and domestic unrest, the gradually decreasing power of the state eventually made the strict gun control impossible. As the ruling elites realized the need to modernize China's defense industry, many non-state groups or ordinary individuals started pursuing foreign guns or replacing their outmoded bird guns with modern ones for purposes of self-defense or committing violence. As this section will describe, the political decentralization and chaotic social order of the late Qing allowed the government to reexamine its stance towards private gun ownership in the new social situation.

Orthodox and Heterodox Camps: the Circulation of Foreign Guns in Local Society

For many late Qing ruling elites, China's vulnerability to foreign invasion from the 1840s onwards was viewed in terms of the tremendous gap in weapon power between China and that of the West. While the small arms technology in the West was advancing rapidly, undergoing what has been dubbed the "breech-loader revolution," China's efforts to augment its armed strength had diminished in the midst of stability and prosperity from the eighteenth century.[55] In the

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[53] Lin Fuxiang, "Sanyuanli dazhang riji 三元里打仗日記" (Diary of the Fighting in Sanyuanli) from *Pinghai xinchou* 平海新籌 (New Plans for Pacifying the Oceans), in *Zhongguo jindaishi ziliao xuanbian* 中國近代史資料選編 (Selected Documents in Modern Chinese History), 23-4. For a detailed exploration about the incident, see Frederic E. Wakeman, *Strangers at the Gate: Social Disorder in South China, 1839-1861* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966).

[54] Duncan MacPherson, *Two Years in China: Narrative of the Chinese Expedition, from its Formation in April, 1840 till April, 1842* (London: Saunders and Otley, 1842), 307.

[55] Geoffrey Parker, *The Military Revolution*, 90

Opium War (1839-1842), the British army outfitted with modern warships and artillery easily defeated Qing army troops which were armed largely with obsolete weapons. The humiliating failure did not set off alarm bells for the Chinese bureaucrats that prompted a fundamental military reform, though some statecraft scholars like Wei Yuan (魏源 1794-1857) called for "learning the barbarians' techniques to subdue them."[56] A little over ten years later, China's military failure in the second Opium War (Arrow War) once again demonstrated the unparalleled development in military capabilities between China and the West. The Mongolian general Sengge Rinchen (僧格林沁 1811-1865), who failed to resist the attack of the Anglo-French alliance troops at the Dagu Forts, lamented that even the banner garrisons in Tongzhou (a suburb of Beijing) were rarely armed with firearms, and were powerless to deter the mighty enemies.[57] Responding to the embarrassing defeats after 1842 when Western imperialism accelerated the political encroachment on Chinese mainland, and to the domestic popular movements including the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1854) and the Nian Rebellion (1851-1868), Qing statecraft literati who saw possession of advanced weapons as a guarantee of military efficacy advocated military

[56] Wei Yuan, *Haiguo tuzhi* 海國圖志 (An illustrated gazetteer of maritime countries) (N.P., 1852), *juan* 1, 1.

[57] *Chouban yiwu shimo* (*Xianfeng chao*) 籌辦夷務始末咸豐朝 (Documents on the handling of barbarian affairs during the Xianfeng era) (Reprint, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1964), *juan* 6, 2200.

modernization.[58] As numerous scholars have pointed out, the significance of these initiatives which appeared for the first time in China's military annals, lay not only in providing the Qing officials with the weapons to fight rebels or defend themselves, but also in their pivotal roles in the introduction of Western science and modern technology.[59]

After the mid-nineteenth century, as some reform-minded officials vigorously implemented military reform, the state's monopoly over the most advanced weapons, of which the imperial government used to be proud began to be loosened. As China became gradually integrated into the global arms network, some modern firearms either imported from abroad or

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[58] Initiated by the famous late Qing reformist thinker Feng Guifen (馮桂芬 1809-1874), and implemented by Li Hongzhang and like-minded officials, their modernization endeavors, known as the self-strengthening movement, led to the creation of Western-style arsenals in Shanghai, Tianjin, Suzhou, and other port cities. Starting from the 1860s, the famous Kiangnan Arsenal in Shanghai, Hanyang Arsenal in Hankou, and many others started providing regional armies with modern weapons and ammunition with the assistance of American and European engineers, mostly Germany. Although orthodox scholar-officials who emphasized the decisive role of the people in the conduct of war, were reluctant to endorse foreign weaponry, late Qing's consistent military setbacks silenced their doubts of Western– style arms and its military Westernization was accelerated. See Thomas L. Kennedy, *The Army of Kiangnan: Modernization in the Chinese Ordance Industry, 1860-1895* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1978).

[59] The modernizing initiative was successful up to the point at which these Chinese arsenals helped introduced Western-style weapons, breech-loading guns in particular, which were dramatically superior to traditional bird guns. For example, as the largest arsenal in East Asia, the Kiangnan Arsenal was able to produce foreign-style small arms that were based on sophisticated technological know-how, including Mauser cartridges, Lee and Snider rifles, and Remington breechloaders and cartridges. With the aid of foreign technicians, its production capacity reached 3,500 rifles per year by 1875. The official statistics shows that the Arsenal produced 65,300 rough breechloaders between 1873 and 1904. As the Kiangnan Arsenal grew rapidly under the endorsement of Li Hongzhang, military industries were beginning to spring up elsewhere in China. As observed by a French military officer Henri Fray, the Hanyang Arsenal established by Zhang Zhidong in Hubei Province possessed the capability to manufacture fifty Mauser rifles and twenty-five thousand cartridges a day with the guidance of German engineers. For the Self-Strengthen Movement and its results, see Mary Clabaugh Wright, *The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism: The T'ung-Chih Restoration, 1862-1874*; Wang Ermin, *Qingshi junshishi lunji*; Bates Gill and Taeho Kim, *China's Arms Acquisition from Abroad: A Quest for "Supeb and Secret Weapons"* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 10.

manufactured domestically occasionally appeared in local society. In Eastern Guangdong, for instance, which was famous for its frequent lineage and village feuds, local inhabitants quickly adopted Western-type rifles, which were brought in from nearby Hong Kong or Macau in committing communal violence.[60] The presence of the foreign gun was gradually not regarded as a novelty in some urban areas as well. One prominent example was the armed escort companies, known as *biaoju* 鏢局, which had developed during the Ming and Qing dynasties to provide security services for wealthy individuals and merchant caravans. By the end of the nineteenth century, Beijing dwellers were accustomed to seeing these escorts, who were also expert martial artists, wandering in the street with foreign guns in hand.[61] Serious offenders like bandits or rebels with intent to injure others, too, actively acquired guns to facilitate crime. Late Qing officials were well aware of the potential threat posed by these illegal gun owners. Gun shooting was not an item to be tested in imperial military examination from Qianlong's reign onward. The frequent report on the armed banditry allowed the naval commander Zhang Peilun (張佩俊 1848-1903) to comment, "if offenders have armed themselves with foreign guns, can the military candidates (武生 *wusheng*) who were just adept at bow and arrow beat them?"[62]

Apart from regular troops and modern police forces, gun carriers during the late Qing were comprised of a variety of people, including but not limited to gentry-led militia forces, ordinary peasants, urban dwellers, rebels, and bandits. It is also difficult to determine which

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[60] See Harry J. Lamley, "Lineage Feuding in Southern Fujian and Eastern Guangdong under Qing Rule," in *Violence in China: Essays in Culture and Counterculture*, eds., Jonathan N. Lipman and Stevan Herrell (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 27-64.

[61] *Xunjingbu* 巡警部 (Police department), Catalogue no. 477-37-1-192, First Historical Archives, Beijing.

[62] *Lishi wenxian* 歷史文獻 (Historical documents) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2006), 143.

types of guns these people carried. When gun-involved violence appeared in late Qing newspapers or government documents, the brand or other details of the weapons were seldom identified; rather they were roughly classified into "native" (土 *tu*) or "foreign" (洋 *yang*). The match-loading gun transferred from Japan during the Ming dynasty had already been indigenized, and was called the bird gun or local gun (土槍 *tuqiang*), while the new Western gun was given the prefix "*yang*", which served to denote their superiority over the traditional ones. However, as Sherman Cochran suggests, Chinese people's distinction between "Chinese" and "Western" was very broad and inexplicit.[63] Similarly, though some major modernizers like Li Hongzhang had an intimate knowledge of foreign weapons and their respective performance, most civilian gun carriers lacked such expertise, labeling them simply as general foreign guns, no matter their place of production.[64]

The emergence of armed forces in local society during the late nineteenth century confirmed what scholars like Philp Kuhn have characterized about the militarized nature of Chinese local society. As suggested by Kuhn, the nineteenth-century militarization of local society "could be visible within both the orthodox, gentry-dominated Confucian culture and the various heterodox, secret-society dominated sectarian subcultures."[65] The village *tuanlian* militia, which was always tied with other militia nearby and developed into regional army embodied the orthodox side of militarization. Bandit bands, secret societies, or "communities in arms" such as the Taiping rebel armies constituted the heterodox aspect of militarization. In a

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[63] Sherman Cochran, *Chinese Medicine Men: Consumer Culture in China and Southeast Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 161.

[64] "Chouyi haifangzhe 籌議海防折 (On the coastal defense)," in *Li Hongzhang Quanji* 李鴻章全集 (Collections of Li Hongzhang) (Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 2008), 161.

[65] Kuhn, *Rebellion and its Enemies in Late Imperial China*, 165.

general sense, the primary distinction between the two modes of militarization is that militia forces had no intent to challenge state authority, though their existence objectively decentralized state power, while the latter behaved to disrupt social order and stability. Borrowing Kuhn's theoretical framework to categorize late Qing private gun ownership in the shadow of increasing militarization, it can be assumed that gun carriers could also be detected within both the orthodox and heterodox camps.

When massive social unrest, ranging from the unremitting popular movements, frequent banditry, to the foreign encroachments, became chronic problems from the mid-nineteenth century, the Qing government's central authority and capability to maintain local order were gravely damaged. As the Taiping and Nian rebellions reached their climax in the 1860s, the government again emphasized the role of popular power in stabilizing social order, as exemplified by the local gentry-led private defense organizations.[66] Known as *tuanlian* or "grouping and drilling," the quasi-official armies and their other administrative functions in local society indicated the devolution of central power and the emergence of militarism, which allows scholars like Franz Michael to use "regionalism" to define the late Qing's political structure.[67]

One of the *tuanlian* militia's distinct features compared with the Banner and Green Standard armies were the adoption of Western weapons. In the rural areas, *tuanlian* were mostly organized by influential local landlords, who were responsible for recruiting mercenaries, building fortifications, acquiring weapons, and training militia members to defend the localities.

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[66] See, Kwang-ching Liu and Richard J. Smith, "The Military Challenge: The North-west and the Coast," in *The Cambeidge History of China,* vol. 11, eds., John K. Fairbank and Kwang-Ching Liu (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 202-73.

[67] Franz Michael, "Introduction: regionalism in nineteenth-century china," in Stanley Spector, *Li Hung-chang and the Huai Army*: *A Study in Nineteenth Century Chinese Regionalism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964), xxi-xiii.

The *tuanlian*'s private and semi-independent nature made the leaders better able to seek advanced weapons, as long as they received local magistrate approval. In the regions that had easy access to the weapons market and purchasing power, foreign guns were more likely to be adopted by *tuanlian* members. For example, in the early 1900s, a gentry association in Guangdong's Xinning County wrote the local government demanding approval to purchase firearms for organizing militia. The request was promptly granted, allowing the militia leaders to purchase 1550 foreign guns from nearby Hong Kong. In the coastal provinces like Guangdong, the wealthy gentry probably had little difficulty procuring foreign guns from Hong Kong and Macau. As Guangdong Governor Guo Songtao lamented in 1880, "foreign guns were sold without any restrictions."[68]

Militia forces also surged in newly emerging commercial cities like Shanghai, Suzhou, and Tianjin to preserve local peace in the crisis of war and social unrest. Following in the footsteps of the Shanghai Volunteer Corps (上海商團 shanghai shangtuan) which was established in 1853 to defend the Shanghai International Settlement, Chinese merchants organized a militia in the city's Chinese district in 1907. The militia, as Elizabeth Perry and Bryna Goodman's works point out, substantially remedied the government's manpower shortage to quell the opium den crisis (1910) and rice riots (1911).[69] The local government thus was not afraid to trust the militia with powerful arms. Once receiving permission from the governor-general of Liangjiang, Shanghai Daotai Cai Naihuang supplied the militia 120 "seven-nine"

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[68] David Faure, *Emperor and Ancestor: Stare and Lineage in South China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 315.

[69] Elizabeth J. Perry, *Patrolling the Revolution: Worker Militias, Citizenship, and the Modern Chinese State* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, inc., 2006), 30-1; Bryna Goodman, *Native Place, City, and Nation: Regional Networks and Identities in Shanghai*, 1853-1937 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 204-05.

rifles and 5000 bullets, and also issued a license to purchase guns. As one memoir suggests, almost all the militia members had guns in hand at the militia's inception.[70] Almost simultaneously with Shanghai, Suzhou merchants Ni Kaiding 倪開鼎 and Hong Yulin 洪毓麟 organized the Suzhou Merchant Sports Association (蘇商體育會 Sushang tiyu hui), which later evolved into the militia corps (蘇州商團 *Suzhou shangtuan*). In early 1907, the Association was allowed to purchase 50 Mauser rifles and 10,000 bullets from Shanghai's foreign trade companies.[71]

The militia forces, the above mentioned armed escort companies, and ordinary armed civilians were overwhelmingly defensive in nature, and their gun ownership was visible to the government, while armed outlaws posed explicit threats to social order and state power. The rebel forces, ranging from the tremendously destructive Taiping rebels to the heterodox secret societies and bandits, all actively sought to purchase or smuggle foreign weapons, though some of these groups were anti-foreign zealots. The primary motive of their actions was essentially to bring about radical changes in political and social spheres, while the foreign gun acquisition and possession could facilitate that end. For instance, when the Taiping Army reached the Suzhou and Shanghai area in 1860, the military commander Li Xiucheng (李秀成 1823-1864) was very taken with foreign guns and cannons. Though the major weapon-supplier countries adopted a neutral stance towards the Taiping and prohibited producers from selling military weapons to the

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[70] "Shanghai shangtuan guangfu shanghai jilue 上海商團光復上海紀略 (History of the Shanghai Volunteer Corps)," in *Xinhai geming zai shanghai shiliao xuanji* 辛亥革命在上海史料選集 (The 1911 Revolution in Shanghai) (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1966), 145.

[71] Tang Keke 汤可可, "Jindai wuxi shangtuan de xingshuai ji shehui gongneng 近代無錫商團的興衰及社會功能" (Merchants' Corps in Modern Wuxi and its social function), *Dangan yu Jianshe* 檔案與建設 (Archives and Construction) 8 (2005): 21.

army, Li was able to get his favored ammunition through an underground channel from Shanghai. As the *North-China Herald* noted in 1860:

> [I]t may be scarcely credible to honest folk in Shanghai that during the whole time the firing was going on from the allied troops, Europeans from among us, one or two of them received as, at least, respectable persons, were actually engaged at various places up the two rivers selling the insurgents gunpowder and arms; the gunpowder under the name of, and packed like Chinese snuff![72]

A few years earlier, the Small Sword Society (小刀會 *xiaodaohui*), a branch of the underground Heaven and Earth Society, staged an uprising and captured Shanghai in 1853. The rebel leaders took advantage of Shanghai's position as a major port of weapon smuggling, acquiring flintlocks and gunpowder from Western traffickers. In his memorial to the court, the governor-general of Liangjiang Yi Liang (怡良 1791-1867) expressed his deep anxiety regarding the rebel's acquisition of more advanced guns. "The ruffians bought brass caps and flintlocks from vicious Westerners. Without firing match and powder, these guns were not vulnerable to the rainy condition."[73] The rebels' adoption of foreign guns had promised to diminish the Qing's military advantage. As Yi Liang depicted the battle scene, "when the rebels attack the city wall, their bullets, falling like rain, were a lot harder to avoid than shells, which caused a lot of injuries."[74] In the 1850s, most Chinese armies were still armed with a mixture of cold steels and inferior matchlocks. Whereas, the secret societies like the Small Sword Society were able to get some better arms, which increased the difficulty of suppression. The uprising had not been

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[72] "The Advance of the Taiping Insurgents on Shanghai," *The North-China Herald*, August 25, 1860, 34.

[73] Shanghai shehui kexueyuan lishi yanjiusuo 上海社會科學院歷史研究所 (The Institute of History, Shanghai Academy of Social Science), *Shanghai Xiaodaohui qiyi shiliao huibian* 上海小刀會起義史料彙編 (Historical documents on the Small Sword Society) (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1980), 176.

[74] Ibid., 177.

utterly subdued until two years later, following joint operations by the Qing military and the Western powers. As we have seen above, one reason for Qianlong's quick suppression of the mid-Qing rebellions initiated by Wang Lun in Shandong and Lin Shuangwen in Taiwan during the eighteenth century lay in the fact that the weapons of regular troops were far superior to those of their antagonists. Comparatively, what can be drawn from the armed rebellions of the late Qing is that the state's monopoly over advanced weapons began to dissolve. The late Qing's frequent ensuing receptiveness to foreign technology imports, including foreign firearms, added to the complexity of the state's firearm control, which lasted until the fall of the dynasty in 1911.

If we scrutinize other forms of what Philip Kuhn termed the heterodox camps of military force, the outlaws with no revolutionary agenda constituted another important category of firearm carriers. These outlaws were largely comprised of robbers spread through both urban and rural areas, Robin Hood-like gangsters hid in the mountainous regions, and some spontaneous or casual criminals who committed violence with pre-supposed motives. Like other agrarian societies, the activities of these outlaws became an imperative part of China's social ecology which ran through the whole Qing dynasty. In the criminal documents or other official written records, the government used the general term bandits (賊 *zei*) to identify them. These men and women, who depended on the use of violence to achieve their purposes, were typically eager to pursue the new, more powerful weapons. Through their illicit activities, their weapon choice, and acquisition channels were shown, which provides particular perspective to gauge how military innovation penetrated into local society.

Even though there are no official statistics available on firearm-related crime in Imperial China, instances of armed conflict were observed in many different textual forms. During the Qing dynasty, most severe criminal cases were reported to and handled by the local magistrates

first, who then were obliged to report some issues that were considered of primary significance to the central bureaucracy.[75] Most cases involving large-scale violence, armed conflict, or homicide were considered extremely serious incidents, which were required to be reported to the central government. The local officials, who were normally subject to multi-layer oversight were unlikely to hide the problems.[76] The ministry officials in the capital would send some representative ones to the emperor. Besides these regular memorials (known as *tiben* 題本), the energetic emperors from Kangxi onward had increasingly used the "secret palace memorial" system to get across local information from his inner circle of trusted officials, including local officials, inspecting censors, and even retired officials.[77] After the death of one emperor, the annalists would organize tons of memorials and edicts, including the ones related to violence and firearm-relate crime into chronological order, which were then published in the *Veritable Records of the Qing* (清實錄 *Qing Shilu*) for later reference.[78] During the whole Qing dynasty, most cases involving large-scale violence, armed conflict, or homicide were considered extremely serious incidents, which were required to be reported to the central government. The local officials, who were normally subject to multi-layer oversight were unlikely to hide the

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[76] Thomas M. Buoye, *Manslaughter, Markets, and Moral Economy: Violent Disputes Over Property in Eighteenth-century China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 239-240.

[77] Silas Wu, *Communication and Imperial Control in China.*

[78] The records of gun-involved crimes are drawn from the *Daqing lichao shilu* (Tokyo: Okura shuppan kabushiki kaisha, 1937-1938).

problems.[79] Certainly, these records were by no means completely comprehensive but represented a considerable amount of information about the gun-related cases nationwide through which the penetration of private guns and its social consequences might be assessed. [80]

Table 2: The Frequency of Armed Robbery in Late Qing

The incidence of armed robbery and banditry gave an explicit indicator of the circulation of firearms in society. Several points emerge from this trending chart. First, among the heterodox groups, the bandits or robbers lagged behind in adopting advanced weapons. Before the 1860s, no criminal case involving the use of a foreign gun was reported, whereas the insurgent forces like the Taipings or Small Sword Society had already acquired some sophisticated weapons from munitions dealers. The diffusion of foreign weapons among bandits or robbers had occurred coincidentally with the Qing state's military modernization efforts. Second, from the 1860s onward, the number of criminal cases involving foreign guns far exceeded the number of bird-gun related crimes. Although the flow of the reported cases to the central bureaucracy was not

[79] Thomas M. Buoye, *Manslaughter, Markets, and Moral Economy: Violent Disputes Over Property in Eighteenth-century China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 239-240.

[80] The records of gun-involved crimes are drawn from the *Daqing lichao shilu* (大清歷朝實錄 Veritable records of the great Qing) (Tokyo: Okura shuppan kabushiki kaisha, 1937-1938).

huge, these cases to some extent indicate that aggressive outlaws exhibited a penchant for foreign-style arms. With the coming of quick-firing guns, there were indications that the low-quality bird guns gradually were replaced by more advanced ones. The proliferation and use of foreign guns by these outlaws after the 1860s exemplified what historians have argued about the endemicity of violent conflict in Chinese society, which was not limited to the major uprisings and rebellions.[81]

The Unstable Relations between the State and Orthodox Armed Forces

The foreign invasions and persistent civil unrest from the early nineteenth century appeared as the catalysts for the spread of Western firearms. The government found itself in a difficult position to restrict the heterodox camps from obtaining the powerful guns from an underground production and distribution network. As we have seen above, the fierce Taiping rebellion and the widespread peasant revolts which plagued the Qing Dynasty from the mid-nineteenth century allowed the government to delegate power to orthodox local elites who were encouraged to organize armed self-defense forces. One significant departure from the earlier strict control of firearms was that these collective defense forces were sanctioned to use firearms, either low-quality local guns or foreign guns, to defend their own interests when the state was unable to perform its police functions. These burgeoning militias, either gentry's rural *tuanlian* scattered throughout the country or Merchants' Volunteer Corps established in the major commercial cities, were all under official supervision. The Chinese term "official oversight and popular management (官督民辦 *guandu minban*)" was suitable to describe the relationship between the militia and the government. As mentioned above, the orthodox local elites who had no means to stockpile the needed weapons always resorted to local and provincial governments'

[81] Steven Harrell, "Introduction," in *Violence in China*, 1-26.

assistance, who might either agree to borrow or sell them the surplus or obsolete firearms, or approve their request to purchase foreign weapons through intermediaries in foreign concessions. For example, in 1907, the Suzhou militia leaders wrote to the city's merchants' association, expressing their eagerness to practice shooting in military drills.

> Without practicing shooting with rifles, the militia must be deficient, nor could our spirit be kindled… Now some obsolete firearms, which were no longer used by the Army, sat idle in the Arsenal Bureau. These old guns would be adequate for the militia to drill... Only then could the merchant corps worthy of the name be established to protect the local community and public welfare.[82]

After deliberate consideration, the Jiangsu provincial government approved the militia leaders' request to borrow forty-two quick rifles. Another similar organization in Wuxi, a major commercial hub adjacent to Suzhou, chose to purchase Mauser rifles and bullets from Shanghai's foreign corporation (洋行 *yanghang*), upon approval by the provincial government.[83]

Obviously, given the semi-independent nature of local genty-led militias, their acquisition of firearms was contingent on a host of social and political factors, including the affordability and accessibility of weapons, the necessity of advanced arms in defense determined by local governments, and the consistency of official sponsorship. First, like the bird gun's initial diffusion trajectory, the foreign gun's circulation was remarkably impacted by the new weapon's uneven distribution between the coastal and interior provinces, and between peaceful and violence-prone areas. As seen in cases mentioned above, wealthy regions or the areas with better access to weapon sources always spawned well-equipped militias and vice versa. A good

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[82] "Suzhou tiyuhui binggao (蘇州體育會稟告 Reports on the Suzhou Sports Association)," in *Suzhou Shanghui Dangan Huibian* (蘇州商會檔案彙編 Historical documents on Suzhou Merchants' Association) (Wuhan: Bashu shushe, 2008), vol.4, 947.

[83] Tang Keke 湯可可, "Jindai wuxi shangtuan de xingshuai ji shehui gongneng (近代無錫商團的興衰及社會功能 *Dang'an yu Jianshe* (檔案與建設 Archival Documents and Construction) 8 (2005): 21.

example is the militia of Shawan, a township in southwestern Canton. By the early 1910s, as one internal document shows, the militia was equipped with fifty Mauser rifles (single-shot), seventy muti-shot rifles, thirty Mauser-type gingals, and ninety traditional bird guns or gingals.[84] At about the same time, some militias of northern provinces took advantage of Tianjin's position as the area's primary gateway for the flow of foreign goods to purchase foreign arms. Local gentry of Zhili Province's Linyu County 臨與縣 successfully raised money to purchase two hundred Mauser rifles and other small arms in Tianjin to arm the militia against constant banditry.[85] Comparatively, in some inland provinces, the relatively advanced weapons among militia troops hardly appeared in common use. One such case is that of the militia in Shangcai County of Henan Province. As the magistrate of this chronically poor county, Xu Shouzi (徐壽茲 1852-1917) was deeply aware that the region's endemic banditry stemmed from disrupted social conditions. He advocated organizing highly trained militia by local gentry in each village against gangs of bandits. Regarding weapon use, Xu approved the production of traditional bird guns or gingalls locally, while ignoring some local gentry's request to procure more expensive foreign guns, for his was anxious about the financial burden incurred as a consequence of weapon acquisition.[86]

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[84] Liu Zhiwei and Chen Chunsheng, "Qingmo minchu Guangdong xiangcun yipie (清末民初廣東鄉村一瞥 A glimpse of the rural society of Guangdong province in the late Qing and early Republican period)," in *Qingzhu Wang Zhonghan Xiansheng Bashiwu ji Wei Qingyun Xiansheng Qishi Huadan Jinian Lunwen Heji* (慶祝王鍾漢先生八十五暨魏清雲先生七十華誕紀念論文合集 Essays to commemorate Wang Zhonghan and Wei Qingyun), ed. Bai Hua (Anhui: Huangshan shuhe, 1999), 433-35.

[85] "Juban Shangtuan 舉辦商團 (Establishing militia)," *Dagon gbao*, January 25, 1910.

[86] Xu Shouzi, *Xuezhi Shiduan* 學知治端 (Thoughts on Learning and Governance), reprinted in *Guangzhenshu jicheng* (Anhui: Huangshan shushe, 1997), vol.9, 465-470.

Second, we should also bear in mind that these gentry-led local militias were encouraged and mobilized only when the state had a pressing need to maintain social order. That means the state viewed an armed militia as an extension of state power, while simultaneously being wary of such force. The milita's potential for thwarting centralization endeavors was not ignored by major statesmen. Yuan Shikai (袁世凱 1859-1916), for example, himself exhibited deep distrust of local gentry and indigenous forces. Rather, as Stephen MacKinnon points out, he was dedicated to training the New Army in Tianjin, fully employing a top-down initiative during the late decades of the Qing dynasty.[87] As many historians have evidently proven, the militarization of local society after the mid-nineteenth century was not persistent, as many militias were not supported by the government or dissolved naturally after the defeats of the Taiping and Nian in South China.[88] When the local order was undermined by the Boxers and foreign powers in the late 1890s, the Qing court's initiative to meet the new challenges paralleled what they had done in the 1850s and 1860s, through forming and training militias in North China to defend the country.

The inconsistency of government policy and the lack of trust towards of militia activity had prevented the popular forces from obtaining the equivalent weapons as the regular army units. The Qing state's attitude towards militia weapons was explicitly expressed in the May 1899 imperial edict, which tended to restrict local militias' access to advanced firearms:

> Recently, robbery has frequently been reported in many provinces. Thus the neighborhood mutual support is urgently required. With respect to the expenditure, all the localities should not create a burden to the common people. As for the weapons, the use of guns of new foreign type would not be recommended, if not under special

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[87] Stephen R. MacKinnon, *Power and Politics in the Late Imperial China: Yuan Shi-kai in Beijing and Tianjin, 1901-1908* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 3-36.

[88] Edward A. McCord, "Militia and Local Minimization in Late Qing and Early Republican China: The Case of Hunan," *Modern China* 2 :14 (1988), 156-87.

> circumstances. Other ordinary foreign guns and bullets are not necessary. Currently, local guns and traditional gunpowder are not uncommon in many inland provinces. They would provide effective defense against restless robbers.[89]

The 1899 edict which directed local officials to deliberate on the issue of civilian weapons when mobolizing people for local defense indicated that the state painstakingly sought to maintain its monopoly over the sophisticated weapons. Comparatively speaking, the late Qing government's stance over legitimate weapon ownership resembled its policy over bird guns during the Qianlong reign, as the state adhered to the principle of maintaining its monopoly over the most advanced weapons, although it delegated certain defense responsibilities to local power holders after the mid-nineteenth century. According to a Tianjin *Dagongbao* 大公報 report in 1909, two years before the fall of the Qing, the Anhui provincial government rejected one local magistrate's request to purchase fifty breech loading rifles and plenty of bullets to arm the local militia. The provincial Bureau of Weapons explained that "these new-style guns were exclusively reserved for the regular army units." Eventually, the militia was entitled to purchase the less powerful muzzle-loading Mauser rifles.[90] Under such political circumstances, the militia forces normally had no legal channels to obtain state-of-the-art weapons, but adopting traditional arms or outdated surplus guns of foreign-style, as we have seen in many cases.

Conclusion

In 1894, American diplomat Thomas Jernigan (1847-1920), who had traveled extensively in China as a hunting enthusiast, marveled that matchlocks were still in use among the Miao

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[89] Chen Baochen, et al., *Dezong jinghuangdi shilu* (德宗景皇帝實錄 Veritable Records of the Guangxu emperor) vol. 44 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 504.

[90] "Qingling houtang kuaiqiang buzhun 請領后膛快搶不准" (Rejection on the purchasing quick guns), *Dagon bao*, October 31, 1909.

people, a major ethnic group living in Southwest China. Jernigan, who himself carried a first-class W.W. Greener rifle, openly derided the backwardness of China's firearms:

> The Chinese sportsman of the present day is, in every essential equipment, as far behind the western sportsman as China is behind western nations in civilization. He shoots with an old pattern muzzle-loading matchlock gun which he calls *niaoqiang*. The barrels may be from four to six feet long, sometimes longer, and is mounted on a stock something like an old fashioned horse pistol.[91]

Jernigan was correct in his assertion that China was falling too far behind the West in firearm technology, as the single shot breech-loading rifle, the later magazine repeating small arms, and many other military innovations had become widely used in Europe and America since the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, Jernigan's 1894 observation was unilateral and oversimplified the complexity of weapon dissemination in all of China. The Miao society, as revealed in Jernigan's report, had experienced a unique historical trajectory that defined its firearm diffusion patterns.[92] The remoteness and inaccessibility of the region blocked the Miao people from experiencing military technological change that was being underway in many other provinces from the second half of the nineteenth century.

As the late Qing government found it hardly possible to implement an effective gun control policy, the model of "control/reliance" gained official attention again. Starting from the

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[91] Thomas R. Jergan, *Shooting in China*, 206.

[92] The use of bird gun among the Miao people dated from the end of the seventeenth century. As one account published in the local gazetteer reveals, the Miao people learned the use of firearms from the remnants of a defeated Wu Sangui's army after Kangxi's victorious campaigns against the Three Feudatories in 1670s. These defeated soldiers, who then retreated to the Miao region, taught local people the use of the bird guns and helped them to cast weapons with available materials. As one of the visible hallmarks of Miao culture, the introduction of firearms helped transform the way of hunting. In her ethnological report, German scholar Inez de Beauclair (1897-1981), who traveled to the Miao tribes in southeast Guizhou in 1948, marveled that the Miao hunters still did not discard their primitive methods to cast guns, which were handed down from the seventeenth century. See *Liping fuzhi* (Gazetteer of Liping prefecture), 1892; Inez de Beauclair, "A Miao Tribe of Southeast Kweichou Cultural Configuration," *Bulletin of the Institute of Ethnology Academia Sinica* 10 (960): 149-69.

1860s as the Chinese state faced major rebellions across much of its territory, the government sought to mobilize people to defeat rebels and maintain order. The state believed that these armed groups or individuals would become another extension of state power. In 1910, two years before the fall of the Qing dynasty, the government proposed the new version of the criminal law, which, unlike the Great Qing Code, loosened the state's grip on private firearms, proposing that any ordinary individuals were permitted to own either bird guns or foreign guns for self-defense purpose as long as they had their weapons registered.

This chapter examines the manifold ways in which the Qing state was gradually impotent to maintain the monopoly of violence and made an adjustment to the new social and political situation. As the whole country was plagued by civil disorder, the existence of armed populace, in the eyes of the state, constituted an extension of state power in local society, as long as their activities could not challenge state authority. Through an overview of the history of gun control policy during the Qing dynasty, this article illustrates that the Qing's authoritarian rule, under which the monarch exercised disciplinary power and empowered ordinary people to defend themselves were inseparable aspects of the state's social control mechanism. As we have seen, the state did not jealously defend its exclusive monopoly on the production and possession of certain types of arms, which were officially defined as civilian weapons. Maintenance of effective monopoly on the most lethal weapons through enforcement of the law against private possession of military weapons and reliance on the armed populace for local defense were crucial to the imperial state's control over its territory. However, "civilian weapon" was not a fixed concept. For example, alarmed by the bird gun's potential to impair central authority, the Qianlong emperor believed that it was imperative to strengthen the regulations regarding bird gun's use and circulation. During the late Qing, carrying a private firearm was once again

allowed to defend localities, but under strict surveillance. This chapter argues that the Qing's policy on private weapons was determined by the stance between two ideologies: the resolute maintenance of their monopoly over violence, and the reliance on social power to defend the localities. Therefore, the state's stance over the armed populace was by no means stationary but a dynamic process, which was contingent on the social situation and political deliberation.

Did the late Qing's gun regulation policies help the government achieve its aims? Local governments indeed implemented policies of gun registration and licensing in the 1910s. For example, the police department of Beijing allowed the city's escort companies to purchase foreign guns, which were all engraved and licensed.[93] Local government also encouraged the formation of militia forces equipped with rifles, which were expected to take up some police functions in local society. Nevertheless, the rise of armed forces in local soceity, either orthodox or heterodox camps, helped create a social milieu, in which military power became essential in the pursuit of power.[94] Putting guns in the hands of "good civlians," was an effective way to defend localities, but it failed to play a role in defending the state, which collapsed in 1911. The last decade of the Qing dynasty was dotted with rebellions and revolutions initied by Sun Yat-sen and his Revolutionary Alliance (同盟會 *Tong menghui*). When these revolutionaries were planning revolts, they raised money overseas and then purchased a large amount of firearms mainly from Japan, which was extremely active in firearm smuggling in the early

[93] "Waicheng Zongting Shensong Guanli ge Biaoju Qiangzhi Laoyin Guize ji Cunqiang Qingce 外城總廳申送管理各鏢局槍枝烙印規則及存槍清冊" (The regulation and inventory on the guns held by escort companies submitted by the police department of the outer city), Catalogue no. 477-37-1-192, First Historical Archives, Beijing.

[94] See Edward A. McCord, *The Power of the Gun,* 119.

twentieth century.[95] Sun in particular encouraged the armed people to support his endeavors. For example, he actively recruited armed bandits to take part in the revolution. Once the new regime had been established, Sun Yat-sen's government, like his late Qing predecessors, had to deal with the problem of armed individuals and groups in local society. This subject will be discussed in the next chapter.

[95] See Feng Ziyou 馮自由, *Geming Yizhi* 革命逸史 (Miscellaneous events about the revolution), vol.4 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1947), 77-88.

~ CHAPTER THREE~

Perilous Equilibrium:

State Power and Indigenous Armed Forces in Early Republican Guangdong, 1912-1924

Introduction

Sparked by a revolt of New Army troops in Wuchang in October 1911, revolutionary events throughout China were spiraling out of control, which ultimately toppled the Qing dynasty. However, social instability and political fragmentation did not come suddenly to an end with the founding of the new Republic. Indeed, local militarization and the proliferation of weapons in local society were still present in China, even when the central government tried to maximize its control over localities.[1] In the midst of political turmoil and social unrest in the 1910s and 1920s, one thing was clear: no single political entity possessed the power to claim the exclusive use of violence in China. The crisis of authority reached its peak in the years following the death of Yuan Shikai in 1916 when regional warlords manipulated their military power to establish control over independent territory. While various warlords were struggling for power, Sun Yat-sen was dedicated to organizing the National Revolutionary Army 國民革命軍 to fulfill his dream of unifying China through the Northern Expedition. Headquartered in Guangdong Province, Sun established a provisional revolutionary government, formed an alliance with the

[1] For the local militarization in early Republican China, see Edward McCord, *The Power of the Gun: The Emergence of Modern Chinese Warlordism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

Communists, and founded the Whampoa Military Academy.[2] His goal was to build a revolutionary government that would gain popular support.

Nevertheless, following a series of setbacks before his ongoing Northern Expedition, Sun came to realize that the mobilization of social forces to support his revolution did not run smoothly. One major group of dissenters to his national objectives was the merchants in Canton, who in the early twentieth century organized the influential self-defense force known as the Canton Merchants' Corps (廣州商團 Guangzhou shangtuan). By the summer of 1924, the Corps grew to a force of over 50,000 people, most of whom were either shopowners or mercenaries hired by local merchants. Initially, Sun Yat-sen believed that the wealthy and well-equipped merchants were an important social force to be reckoned with. However, the merchant community in Canton, having military backing, was not favorably impressed by Sun's social policies and gradually defied his political authority. Ultimately, the irreconcilable conflict between Sun's Guangdong government and armed merchants was exposed with the Canton Merchants' Corps Incident (廣州商團事變 Guangzhou shangtuan shibian) in the October of 1924. When the leaders of the Merchants' Corps purchased arms and ammunition from Belgium, Sun became suspicious of their anti-government activity, and ordered to confiscate the shipment upon its arrival in Canton in August 1924. Over the next two months, negotiations failed to result in settlement and the conflict escalated dramatically to an armed fight. The Canton merchants

[2] The Whampoa Military Academy was established in 1924 when Sun Yat-sen and his newly organization Nationalist Party stationed in Canton as their revolutionary base against warlorism. For the establishment of the Whampoa Military Academy, see Lincoln Li, *Student Nationalism in China, 1924-1949* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 22-40.

staged an uprising on October 15, which was brutally suppressed by Sun with his Soviet-trained army.[3]

The bloody conflict in October 1924 was an accumulation of long-term discontent between indigenous armed forces, represented by the Canton merchants, and Sun Yat-sen's Guangdong government. The social and political chaos following the collapse of the Qing accelerated the spread of local militarization throughout China. This incident in Canton provides us a prime example of how the early Republican government, despite its frailty, tried to monopolize armed force and how the already militarized local society responded to the agenda of claiming legitimacy of political power. As discussed in chapter two, the late Qing government adopted the model of "reliance/control" to manage its relations with the armed individuals and groups. This approach continued to be adopted by the early Republican government, which chose to cooperate with armed forces in local society when the state was weak. For example, the Merchants' Corps played an increasing role in maintaining local order. Since its inception, the Corps was able to keep neutrality with shifting political powers, including Sun Yat-sen's regime, who sometimes relied on the Corps to maintain social order.[4] However, this cooperative relationship had a prerequisite. As this chapter will argue, Sun Yat-sen's shifting stances towards

[3] For the Sun Yat-sen's military cooperations with the Communists and the Soviet Union, see F. F. Liu, *A Military History of Modern China, 1924-1949* (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1972), 1-24; C. Martin Wilbur, *Sun Yat-sen: Frustrated Patriot* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 112-65.

[4] A prominent example was that Cen Bozhu, the founding leader of the Corps, was invited by Long Jiguang in 1916 to participate in an official meeting on maintaining social order of Canton on the eve of his defeat by Sun Yat-sen and Chen Jiongming. See "Haizhu huiyi zhi dacanju 海珠會議之大慘劇" (The tragedy of the Haizhu Meeting), *Huazhi ribao*, April 14, 1916.

armed merchants indicated that the early Republican government frowned on private armed forces lest they threatened the government's monopoly on power.

Previous studies on the Merchant Corps Incident, though offering in-depth analyses on the complexity of merchant community and the KMT's efforts for local control, have seemingly downplayed one important bone of contention in the controversy: the confiscation of arms ordered by the Merchants' Corps.[5] Though the clash between two bodies had been brewing for

[5] In the English-language literature, almost all the studies of the Chinese Nationalist Revolution (1922-1928) and Sun Yat-sen's frustrated political life invariably mention the controversy between the Canton merchant community and Sun's revolutionary government. Scholars of the field have adopted two general approaches. Pioneered by C. Martin Wilbur, the first approach placed the government agencies at the century of inquiry, and was to fathom the multiple ways Sun and his revolutionary alliances met the challenges imposed by the social and political environment of Canton. It is argued that Sun's economic initiatives and the presence of extra-provincial mercenary forces together helped shatter the city's tranquility, which aggravated the antipathy of the merchant community. Beyond just scrutinizing the governmental interventions in the city, other scholars also seek to give voice to indigenous perspectives and to underscore local responses towards the Kuomintang dominance in Canton. In his brilliant study on the early twentieth-century Canton, Michael Tsin rejects the notion that the conflict indicated "a simple dichotomy between new and old forces." Conversely, his research on the merchant community shows that they did not have antipathy towards Sun's revolutionary agenda. The conflict stemmed from "the general disenchantment with the failed promise of the new regime." Given its historical role in impeding Sun's unification enterprise, there have been voluminous studies of the origins of the conflict and its political implications. Both the Nationalist and Marxist historians who posit a revolutionary and national view in writing Chinese history have unanimously sunk the Merchants' Corps and its leader Chen Lianbo (陳廉伯 1884-1944) into obscurity. In 1956, the Marxist historian Xu Songling 徐嵩龄 portrayed the Merchants Corps as a "counterrevolutionary group" led by Chen, an "imperialist running-dog." Similarly, Nationalist historiography has perpetuated this view, blaming Canton Merchants' anti-government activities that plagued Sun Yat-sen's North Expedition plans. See C. Martin Wilbur, *Sun Yat-sen: Frustrated Patriot* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 229-269. Wilbur, *Forging the Weapons: Sun Yat-sen and the Kuomintang in Canton, 1924* (New York: East Asian Institute of Columbia University, 1966), 89-106; Wilbur, *The Nationalist Revolution in China, 1923-1928* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983). 19-23; Michael Tsin, *Nation, Governance, and Modernity in China: Canton, 1900-1927* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 88, 91; Xu Songling, "Yijiuersi Nian Sun Zhongshan de Beifa yu Guangzhou Shangtuan Shibian 一九二四年孫中山的北伐與廣州商團之變 (Sun Yat-sen's northern expedition and the Guangzhou Merchants' Corps Incident of 1924," *Lishi Yanjiu* (Historical Studies) no. 3 (1956): 59-69; Luo Jialun, ed. *Geming Wenxian* 革命文獻 (Documents on the Revolution), vol. 10 (Taipei:

years, it was the incident of arms confiscation that made the hatred reach its climax. After the suppression of the Corps, Sun Yat-sen ordered his son Sun Ke (孫科 1891-1973) who was appointed as the mayor of Canton in 1922, to meet warlord Zhang Zuolin (張作霖 1875-1928), head of the Fengtian Clique 奉天系. Wondering what the Merchants' Corps was, Zhang was deeply puzzled why these prosperous merchants also obtained weapons passionately and opposed the government.[6] Zhang's query to Sun raises another theme addressed in this chapter. What role did the Merchants Corps play in Canton city and Guangdong province? How did the merchant community build its relationship with Sun Yat-sen and his government? Why did the Merchants Corps obtain weapons? In order to show how Sun dealt with the armed merchant in Guangdong, it was inevitable to identify the armed force itself. Through a detailed examination of the social circumstance of modern Guangdong, this chapter also suggests that the social ecology manifested in the proliferation of guns in Guangdong society made the notion of "self-defense" overwhelmingly acceptable, which promoted the formation of the Canton Merchants' Corps.

The case study of Guangdong illustrates the general trend in many other provinces of the early Republican period. The 1911 Revolution did not bring political stability and social tranquility to China. As discussed in the Introduction, the proliferation of private guns during this period emerged in reaction to both internal social pressure– armed banditry, intensified lineage

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Zhongyang wenwu gungyingshe, 1973), 1470-83; Zou Lu, *Zhongguo guomindang shigao* 中國國民黨史稿 (An outline history of the Chinese Guomindang) (Changsha: Minzhi shuju, 1931), 1093-95.

[6] Wu Tiecheng 吳鐵城, *Wu Tiecheng Huiyilu* 吳鐵城回憶錄 (The memoirs of Wu Tiecheng) (Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 1968), 139.

feuding, and persistent military conflicts– and external condition: the easy availability of firearm sources. In the meantime, the diffusion of guns into local society not only helped support the formation of militia forces, but also fostered the conditions under which ambitious individuals or groups strengthened their power through the acquisition of weapons.[7] Such social circumstances were especially obvious in Guangdong.

In this southern province, various political entities who claimed themselves the legitimate ruler dipped in and out in early Republican period. Immediately after the 1911 Revolution ending the Qing Dynasty, the province was under control of Chen Jiongming (陳炯明 1878-1933), a loyal follower of Sun Yat-sen. In 1914, Chen and Sun were chased out of Guangdong by the Old Guangxi Clique army, allied with President Yuan Shikai, who then appointed warlord Long Jiguang (龍濟光 1867-1925) from Guangxi, who ruled most of Guangdong until late 1917. At that time, Long was pushed out of the province after his defeat with Sun Yat-sen and his alliance. Sun then established an anti-Beijing regime in Canton, which served as headquarters for his famous Constitutional Protection Movement 護法運動 (1917-1922). Sun's revolutionary initiative was backed by his old ally, Chen Jiongming, who, however, broke their alliance and refused Sun's plan of national reunification in 1922. Sun was forced to flee to Hong Kong, but within the same year, he returned and chased Chen from Guangdong with the help of the Yunnan and Guangxi Armies (known as guest armies, 客軍 *kejun*). Sun then established a new regime that "ushered in a new era of radical, nationalistic politics in Guangdong under the leadership of

[7] Edward McCord, *Military Force and Elite Power in the Formation of Modern China* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 89-90.

the Guomindang (GMD)."[8] With the aid of Soviet advisers and the newly formed Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Canton once again became the headquarters of Sun's campaign against Beijing warlord's government.[9]

This chapter provides new perspectives on the incident and the conflicts underlying the arms confiscation by taking an in-depth look at the government's stance towards the possession of weapons by non-state actors through the lens of social and institutional history. In order to explain why the merchants of Canton organized private armed forces that grew to a Corps of more than 20,000 men, this chapter first sets Canton in a broad social and political context of Guangdong province, which paves the way for an exploration of the formation of private armed forces, and an analysis of the role these forces played in local society. This chapter then presents a detailed study of the Corps itself and investigates how the conflicts escalated surrounding the seizure of arms. Placing the incident in the broad context of the government's stance towards private gun ownership and armed militia forces, this section argues that the early Republican government frowned on private armed forces lest they threaten the government's monopoly of power. Utilizing government documents, newspaper reports, private writings, and juridical cases, the research thus not only enriches our understanding of the complexities of revolutionary agenda and local reality during the early Republic, but also provides deeper insights into the dynamic mechanisms through which government coexisted with armed individuals and groups.

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[8] Elizabeth J. Remick, *Regulating Prostitution in China, Gender and Local State building, 1900-1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 107.

[9] John Fitzgerald, *Awakening China: Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 150-52.

The Social Ecology of Gun Violence in Guangdong

The Violent Setting of Guangdong

If seen from the viewpoint of a satellite at night, the border of Guangdong Province in South China today is remarkably visible as the acid artificial light of the region's prosperous cities brightens the land. As China's economic showcase of reform and modernization today, the specialty of Guangdong Province lies not only in its advanced economy, but also in its unique cultural traits and historical trajectories. Even in the early twenty-first century, Guangdongese or *guangdongren* 廣東人 saw themselves as ethnically different from other Chinese people in the north. Geographically speaking, the Nanling Mountains rising from western Jiangxi province and then stretching to Guangxi separated Guangdong from the rest of China. The mountains in the north and the Pearl River Delta in the south together helped shape a distinctive culture and social morphology. According to G. William Skinner's geographical system, most of Guangdong falls into the Lingnan macroregion.[10] Its distinctiveness is directly apparent in the multitude of languages spoken in the province. Apart from Mandarin Chinese as an official language, a majority of the population speak Cantonese, along with sporadic Hakka and Min speakers.

Regarding this region's social structure in history, unlike North China, where owner-cultivators predominated villages and the influence of lineage was less prevalent, sophisticated kinship organizations were predominant in Guangdong and assumed significant social roles in

[10] G. William Skinner delineates nineteenth-century China into eight macroregions: North, Northwest, Lower Yangzi, Middle Yangzi, Upper Yangzi, Southeast, Lingnan, and Yungui, and a separate macriregion, Manchuria. See Skinner, "Regional Urbanization in Nineteenth-Century China," in *The City in Late Imperial China*, ed. G. William Skinner (Stanford: Stanford University 1977), 211-53.

local society.[11] Due to its geographical location, the region was opened up to the outside world much earlier than other inland provinces during the Ming and Qing dynasties. It was through Macau and Canton that foreign religions, ideas, and exotic commodities, though remaining in small scale before the mid-nineteenth century, were introduced to China.[12] After the First Opium War (1839-1842), Guangdong's contacts with the West were even more pronounced as a result of geographical proximity to Hong Kong, a British colony since 1841. The bustling Pearl River Delta area, in particular, had taken advantage of the geographical environment and frequent international contacts, shaping a particular Lingnan culture that embraced diversity, entrepreneurship, and compatibility.

[11] British anthropologist Maurice Freedman first used the term "lineage" as a description of the communal organization form in Southeastern China. Freedman was echoed by James Watson who define the lineage is "a corporation in the sense that members derive benefits from joint-owned properties and shared resources; they also join in corporate activities on a regular basis. Furthermore, members of a lineage are highly conscious of themselves as a group in relation to others, whom they define as outsiders." See Maurice Freedman, *Lineage Organization in Southeastern China* (London: Athlone Press, 1958); and *Chinese Lineage and Society: Fukien and Kwangtung* (London: Athlone Press, 1966); James L. Watson, "Chinese Kinship Reconsidered: Anthropological Perspectives on Historical Research," *China Quarterly*, No. 92 (1982), p. 594; Jack M. Potter, "Land and Lineage in Traditional China," in *Family and Kinship in Chinese Society*, eds. Ai-li S. Chin and Maurice Freedman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1970), 121-39.

[12] For the impacts of Hong Kong and Macau on the South China, see Joseph Tse-Hei Lee, *The Bible and the Gun: Christianity in South China, 1860-1900* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Huang Qichen 黃啟臣, *Aomen Lishi* 澳門歷史 (A History of Macau) (Macau: Aomen lishi xuehui, 1999).

Figure 7: Guangdong Province in China

The special features of the cultural cycle offered excellent soil for the formation of a rebellious and revolutionary spirit. From the late nineteenth century onwards, political movements that transformed modern China, ranging from the major anti-Manchu activities before 1911 to the Nationalist Revolution led by Sun Yat-sen in the 1910s and 1920s, mostly began in Guangdong. It was also in Guangdong that Hong Xiuquan and his followers made their preparations for the Taiping Rebellion, which, as China's most destructive nineteenth– century war, almost toppled the Qing Empire. Local officials of the Qing government often lamented that Guangdong's proximity to Macau and Hong Kong, both of which were centers for ammunition smuggling, became contributing factors in the rise of rebellious movements and secret

societies.[13] As the imperial central power weakened in the mid-nineteenth century, the pace of local militarization also accelerated, bringing about widespread local armed forces such as militia (*tuanlian*) organized by local gentry, organized armed banditry, and other individuals armed themselves for either defensive or aggressive purpose. This situation did not cease with the fall of the Qing dynasty, as the new Republican period was marked by political instability and chaos.[14]

Starting from the nineteenth century, a number of sociopolitical factors facilitated the proliferation of various types of guns in Guangdong society, which included the erosion of imperial power, the subculture of violence, the proximity to the source of weapons, and the increasing demand for weapons by non-military individuals and groups. The difficulties of estimating the number of guns scattered in local society are unavoidable, because, unlike regular soldiers whose guns were registered, armed outlaws were always on the move and striving to avoid detection. Anonymous individuals or groups who had guns for self-defense, in the absence of an effectively enforced gun registration policy, were always invisible to the government. However, some witness reports and social surveys provide a glimpse of the pervasiveness of privately-owned guns in society. In 1912, when the Qing dynasty was on its deathbed, Zhang Mingqi (张鸣歧 1875-1945), the last governor-general of Liangguang, argued that "bandits and secret societies spread like prairie fire.... Their sophisticated weapons, procured from Hong

[13] David Faure, *Emperor and Ancestor: State and Lineage in South China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 314.

[14] For the complex social and political conditions of Guangdong in the late Qing and early Republican period, see Fitzgerald, *Awakening China*.

Kong and Macau or provided by revolutionaries, were even better than military weapons."[15] Another observation comes from an editorial that appeared in the Hong Kong-based Chinese-language newspaper *Huazi ribao* (華字日報 Chinese Daily), which in 1924 noted that "[A]mong all Chinese provinces, guns may be the most commonly found in Guangdong. Besides soldiers on service, Merchants' Volunteer Corps (商團 *shaungtuan*), village militias (鄉團 *xiangtuan*), bandits, and many ordinary individuals all owned various types of firearms. The number of guns now in Guangdong may be as many as four million."[16] One year later, Japanese businessman Chōdo Shibuya conducted an investigation on Guangdong's local armed forces, estimating that the number of modern rifles carried by militiamen might reach to 128,000.[17] It should be noted that this number did not include other inferior traditional firearms and handguns. Another contemporary source showed that at least 200,000 guns were carried by peasants in Nanhai County, while in Fanyu and Shunde County, the number might be over 180,000.[18] So-called self-defense guns, these weapons were registered and visible to the local government. Though the statistical reports could be taken as no more than a rough summary, they at least attested to the popularity of guns in Guangdong society.

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[15] "Duyuan Zhang juzou yuesheng feifeng shenzhi qingxiang chuli yuanbian rengqing fenbie Yichang xunchang geijiang yuanyouzhe 督院張具奏粵省匪風甚熾清鄉出力員弁仍請尋常給獎緣由折" (On the awarding to the officials who managed to pacify the bandits in Guangdong province), *Liangguang guanbao* 兩廣官報, 12 (1912): 15.

[16] He Minhun 何民魂, "Zisha di Sunwen 自殺底孫文" (To kill Sun Yat-sen), *Huazi ribao*, October 24, 1924.

[17] Chōdo Shibuya, "Nanzhina aidao yu tufei diaocha 南支那海盜與土匪調查" (Investigation on pirates and bandits in South China), *Dongya jingji yanjiu* 1(1928): 132.

[18] "Baoquan minming yu tongjiao hanfei 保全民命與痛剿悍匪" (Protecting people's lives and stamping out ruthless bandits), *Guangzhou minguo ribao* 廣州民國日報, April 23, 1926.

Even before the coming of Western-style weapons to Guangdong, the province was known for its residents' use of weapons. Civilian weapons in Guangdong, which originally constituted a mixture of cold steels and traditional muskets were becoming more complex and diverse after the mid-nineteenth century. As noted in chapter two, many coastal residents of the province were well acquainted with firearms from the early Qing period. The famous Cantonese scholar Qu Dajun (屈大均 1630-1696), writing in the seventeenth century, noted that "[G]uns were commonly found in Guangdong. In the hill areas, men learned to use them from the age of ten, and Xinhui County was known for making them."[19] Bird guns were widely used in hunting, lineage feuding, and temple sacrifice during the Ming-Qing period. As small arms technology in the West was advancing rapidly by the mid-nineteenth century, producing more efficient breech-loading rifle and repeating small arms, individuals or groups who demanded guns in Guangdong gradually switched from traditional bird guns to these modern weapons of various brands and types. For example, several newspaper reports described in the late 1890s that some factory workers even armed themselves with foreign guns in fighting their colleagues when conflicts arose or when chasing robbers.[20] As civilian gun possession became widespread in the early twentieth century, the selections of guns became more diverse and powerful. Another statement issued by the Guangdong government in 1926 suggested the broad diversity of firearms owned by non-military individuals, while the traditional bird guns only constituted a minor portion of civilian weapons. It was shown in this official statistic that the small arms scattered in local

[19] Qu Dajun, *Guangdong Xinyu* 廣東新, 441.

[20] "Lun hui yuanjigong xiedoushi 論穗垣機廠械鬥事" (On the armed fighting in the machine factory of Guangdong), *Shenbao*, December 19, 1888; "Xuedong Tanxie 粵東談屑" (On the trifles in the eastern Guangdong), *Shenbao*, June 9, 1899.

society included not only traditional bird guns, and, more predominantly, foreign guns or rifles manufactured by Mauser, Colt, Browning, Mannlicher, and Lee, and also their Chinese copies.[21]

The Social Impact of the Proliferation of Guns

The widespread use of firearms, either foreign guns or traditional bird guns, reflected and reinforced a social milieu within which an atmosphere of violence and insecurity flourished. Myriad violent acts, as we shall see, including armed banditry and lineage feuding prevailed in Guangdong society in the absence of effective state control. An official report in the 1920s was not exaggerating when it claimed "the proliferation of privately-owned guns appeared as a big social problem in Guangdong."[22]

Lineage Feuding

During the Qing Dynasty, Guangdong had long been a region of turmoil and instability, as ethnic disputes and inter-lineage feuds became ever more routine, engendering a subculture of violence and conflict. The central government was less forcefully felt there. In his finely wrought study of collective violence in a Chinese county, William Rowe, writing about Hubei Province, ascertains that "China has been as violent as most other human societies, and perhaps more violent than many."[23] Such assertion is very apt to describe the social ecology of Guangdong. Literati in Guangdong's history had never hesitated to speak of the violent character of the people and the role of violence in social life. The influential Confucian Philosopher Ding Jie (丁

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[21] "Chayan renmin ziwei qiangpao changcheng 查驗人民自衛槍炮章程" (Regulations on the self-defense guns), *Guangzhou minguo ribao*, December 7, 1926.

[22] Hu Zhongtao 胡仲弢, "Guangdong Difang Jingweidui Gexian Bianlian Jingguo Qingxing 廣東地方警衛隊各縣編練情形" (Report on the police forces in all the counties of Guangdong), N.P., 1922, 15.

[23] William T. Rowe, *Crimson Rain*, 3.

杰 1738-1807) commented that "the ethos of feud originated from Min (闽 Fujian Province), progressed in Yue (粤 Guangdong), and boomed in Chao (潮 Eastern Guangdong)."[24] As the mid-seventeenth century gazetteer of the Xinhui County 新會縣 recorded, "[A]fter Wanli's reign (1572-1620), people grew gradually unscrupulous. Powerful and aggressive local landlords tyrannized the local communities… In almost ten years, litigations over the mountain rights boomed. Lineage feuding and even mass killings became widespread."[25] The gazetteer account and scholar's reflection on Xinhui's feud was just the tip of the iceberg when discussing the social violence of Guangdong. As many contemporary writings suggested, the foremost manifestation of the society's violent component was the endemic feuding, which took forms of organized violence and made many parts of the province a truly turbulent place.

Due to the lack of complete records, it is hardly possible to measure how many intra-lineage feuds took place from the beginning of the Qing dynasty. What can be analyzed here is the historical causation and motivation of violent practices. The Han people in Guangdong, including the Cantonese, the Hakka, and the Chaozhou all migrated originally from the North at different times throughout history. Its special historical formation helped harbor some strongly developed lineages, under which the agnatic or exogamous groups were held together by both cultural and economic bonds. During the prosperous eighteenth century, Guandong was subject to pressures from increasing population density and tenancy, which made the competition for

[24] Ding Jie, *Zhi doulun* 止斗論 (On ceasing strife), in *Guangdong wenzheng* 廣東文徵 (Essays collected from Guangdong province), vol. 5, ed. Wu Daorong (Hong Kong: Guangdong wenzheng bianyin weiyuanhui, 1973), 27.

[25] *Xinhui xianzhi* 新會縣誌 (Gazetteer of Xinhui county, Guangdong), 1686, vol 5: 23b-24a.

control of scarce resources intense.[26] As Harry Lamley and Thomas Buoye's studies on lineage feuding in Guangdong show, that the impetus for violent conflicts came essentially from the contention over property rights such as land, mountain, and water boundaries, which resulted in collective and lineage-based action.[27] Often, the local officials, who either hesitated to get involved between rival lineages or attempted to gain advantages from the strife, provided limited restraints. Starting from the eighteenth century, lineage feuding and violent disputes consistently unsettled Guangdong society, the people of which seemed inured to the presence of interpersonal conflicts.

The confrontations always took the forms of armed affrays, in which plenty of weapons, either cold steels or firearms, were widely used. Long before the nineteenth century, the inhabitants living in the coastal areas carried either farm tools or a variety of old-style firearms, including swords, spears, and bird guns or jingals.[28] When the Qianlong emperor issued the aforementioned edict in 1777 that led to the confiscation of bird guns throughout the country, the Guangdong provincial government collected 11,251 bird guns.[29] Even though the number might

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[26] William Rowe, *China's Last Empire: The Great Qing* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 90-6. For the demographic change during the Qing dynasty, see Ping-ti Ho, *Studies on the Population of China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959).

[27] Harry J. Lamley, "Lineage Feuding in Southern Fujian and Eastern Guangdong under Qing Rule," in *Violence in China: Essays in Culture and Counterculture*, ed. Jonathan N. Lipman and Stevan Harrell (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1900), 27-64; Thomas Buoye, *Manslaughter, Markets, and Moral Economy: Violent Disputes over Property Rights in Eighteeenth-Century China*, 153-92.

[28] Chen Shengshao 陳盛韶, *Wensu Lu* (問俗錄, Record of asking about customs) (Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 85.

[29] "Tietong gao zhi yi chi yishangang zhe song ju xiaohui, etc." (鐵統高至一尺以上送局銷毀等, Destroying all the firearms with height higher than one inch), in volume entitled "haifang" (sea defense) chapter, *Guangdong Qingdai dang'an lu* (廣東清代檔案錄, Archival documents of Guangdong during the Qing dynasty), N.P., https://open.library.ubc.ca/collections/asian/items/1.0214167#p4z-4r0f:

not tally with the actual amount, it is indicative of the abundance of private guns in local society. When informed that some guns were used for ritual purposes at the temple sacrifices, the local authorities quickly returned them.[30] Of course, these returned bird guns, still made for handy weapons in lineage feuding. Governor-General Nayancheng (那彥成 1764-1833), who quelled the secret societies in Guangdong, discovered in 1805 that many lineage groups even sold their lands or estates to buy arms from either Macau or underground gunsmiths.[31] Although these witness accounts could not offer an accurate picture of bird gun circulation in Guangdong, it can be assumed that the guns were evidently common before the nineteenth century, and were an inevitable component of social life in Qing Guangdong.

A tremendous transformation took place from the early nineteenth century onwards when the introduction of Western-type rifles and other firearms made armed affrays more frequent and more brutal. The acquisition of powerful weapons was often a crucial point for maintaining power dominance against their rival lineages. Foreign guns' involvement in the large-scale feuds probably started in the well-known Hakka-Punti Clan Wars from 1855-1867, a devastating conflict taking place to the west of the Pearl River Delta between the Cantonese-speaking natives (Punti), and the Hakka.[32] The bloody battle raged in 1857 when the Punti brought large numbers of foreign "fast guns" through Hong Kong, where "guns were freely sold" before the outbreak of

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[30] See Faure, *Emperor and Ancestor,* 329.

[31] Nayancheng, *Na Wenyi gong zouyi* (那文毅公奏議, The collection of Na Wenyi's memorials), 1834, 10/46a-50b.

[32] For a detailed study of the armed conflict, see Liu Ping, *Bei yiwang de zhanzheng: Xianfeng Tongzhi nianqian Guangdong tuke daxiedou yanjiu, 1854-1867* 被遺忘的戰爭：咸豐同治廣東土客大械鬥研究: 1854-1867 (Forgotten war: tu-ke feuding in Guangdong during the Xianfeng and Tongzhi decades) (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2003).

the Sino-French War.[33] The huge gap in weapon power between both sides had a great effect on the outcome of the clan war. Zhang Zhidong (張之洞,1837-1909), Governor-General of Guangdong-Guangxi, reported in 1885 that "Weapons from abroad can be bought anywhere, and so Western guns, banners, and knives are available in every village."[34] Thereafter, the ready accessibility of guns and unrest led to an arms race of sorts, incentivizing other lineage groups to purchase even more powerful guns, or replace their traditional Chinese weapons with ever more lethal foreign guns. Starting from the late nineteenth century, local newspapers picked up these foreign gun-involved strives and gave them prominent display. [35]

The founding of the Republic did not bring social stability to Guangdong. Instead, the constant warfare, the frequent banditry, and the collapsed government authority made lineage members believe the acquisition of powerful weapons was essential to maintaining dominance. One example from Puning County 普寧縣 is the Fang surname lineage. In the early 1910s, the Fang family "bought five or six hundred foreign guns, which initiated the lineage's climb to military power in the County."[36] A few years later, lineage feuds happened in Qingyuan County

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[33] Guo Songtao 郭嵩燾, *Guo Songtao riji* 郭嵩燾日記 (Diaries of Guo Songtao) (Changsha: Hunan Renmin chubanshe, 1981), 332.

[34] Cited from Faure, *Emperor and Ancestor*, 315; Zhang Zhidong, *Zhang Wenxiang gong wenji* 張文襄公文集 (Collections of Zhang Zhidong) (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1965), 14/9a.

[35] "Shipaixi cun juzhong xiedou 石牌洗村聚眾械鬥" (Lineage feuding in Shipaixi village), *Shenbao*, November 22, 1894.

[36] "Puning xian dizhu cuican nongmin shimoji 普寧縣地主摧殘農民始末記" (The details of the landlords of Puning County tortured peasants), *Zhongguo nongmin* (Chinese peasantry), 4 (1926): 12.

of Northwestern Guangdong, in which each lineage "carried more than ten thousand foreign rifles."[37]

The use of these weapons would have two major consequences for lineage feuds. First, the adoption of modern rifles that possessed greater accuracy and range of fire profoundly altered the way of fighting among rival lineages. Previously, the lineages that were equipped with bird guns' always fought on the appointed fields to ensure their enemies came into the gun's short range arc of fire. Starting from the nineteenth century, the introduction of quick-firing armed men more frequently positioned themselves at more hidden and protected positions. Some villages became heavily fortified by solid walls and watch towers, some of which were equipped with cannon batteries.[38]

Second, the feud affrays escalated when the lineages hired skilled marksmen to fight against their rivals. As *Shenbao* reported in 1892, the Chen surname lineage had a long-standing dispute over water rights with the neighboring Li lineage in a county close to Canton. The fierce competition over irrigating water gave rise to armed feuding. Both lineages hired bandits or rebels (斗匪 *doufei*) who were skilled in the use of guns as proxies in the surname affrays.[39] The participation of professional mercenary bands, as shown in many similar cases, indicated that the armed conflicts were not limited between the rival lineages, but escalated into large-scale warfare, which "detached from local lineage and surname groups."[40] The mercenaries (銃手

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[37] "Qingyuan pajiang fasheng xiedou 清遠琶江發生械鬥" (Lineage feuding in Bajiang village of Qingyuan county), *Minguo ribao*, Feburary 11, 1926.

[38] Niida Noboru, *Chugoku no Noson Kazoku* (Tokyo: Tokyo daigaku shuppankai, 1952), 386.

[39] "Juzu xiedou 聚眾械鬥" (Lineage feuding), *Shenbao*, April 13, 1892.

[40] Harry J. Lamley, "Lineage Feuding in Southern Fujian and Eastern Guangdong under Qing Rule," in *Violence in China: Essays in Culture and Counterculture*, 50.

chongshou), in most cases were roving bandits or pirates who were desperate for profit and trained in the use of modern firearms as well as traditional bird guns. In the aftermath of the mercenaries' violent actions, the numbers of feud-related incidents were undoubtedly increased and the extent of their damage, became severe. John Scarth, a British businessman who frequently traveled to Guangdong from the 1850s marveled about the increasing numbers of gun-related feudings in almost every single village of Guangdong.[41] In 1915, a feud broke out between two rival lineages in suburban Canton, both of which readily recruited hundreds of armed bandits. The fighting leading to numerous casualties was out of government control when "gunfire licked the heavens." Stray bullets injured passengers waiting in the adjacent train station, and even jeopardized the safety of the running train.[42]

Armed Banditry

For centuries, banditry had been one of the paramount threats that the people in Guangdong had to encounter. In eastern Guangdong, in particular, it was said that, "The bandit numbers in Guangdong are the largest under heaven" (粵東盜匪甲天下 *Yuedong daofei jia tian xia*).[43] During his post as the governor-general of Guangdong and Guangxi, Zhang Zhidong in his memorial to the court in 1885 complained that "In Eastern Guangdong, seas and rivers intersect the mountain-chains. People there were fierce and violent. Bandits abounded in greater

[41] John Scarth, *Twelve Years in China: The People, the Rebels, and the Mandarins* (Edinburgh: Thomas Constable and Co., 1860).

[42] "Shalun Liangxiang Xiedou Zhi Jilie 沙倫兩鄉械鬥之激烈" (The intense armed affray between the Sha and Lun counties), *Dagong bao*, November 12, 1915.

[43] He Wenping, "Bei Yulunhua de Lishi: 'Yuedong Dao Jiatianxia' Shuo yu Jindai Guangdong Feihuan 被輿論化的歷史'粵東盜甲天下'與近代廣東匪亂" (The publicized history: the historical truth about the saying that 'Yuedong dao jiatianxia), *Journal of Sun Yat-sen University* 194 (2005): 40-46.

numbers than in any other provinces."[44] From the late 1890s, media never stopped reporting the frequent occurrence of robbery, killing, and torture, portraying Guangdong as the cradle of banditry. In 1897, Shanghai's *Shenbao* commented that "The bandits in Guangdong are the most sneaky and unscrupulous among the provinces."[45] The estimate of bandits numbers are varied, ranging between 10,000 and 30,000 in the early twentieth century.[46] Accurate figures are difficult to come by without further information about how the numbers of bandits were calculated by different groups. These estimates at least indicated that the banditry and its associated violence became enduring facets of social life in modern Guangdong.

Bordering upon Hong Hong, a major hub for weapon diffusion, bandits in Guangdong armed themselves with foreign guns much earlier than in Northern provinces. Shanghai's *Shenbao* commented in 1894 "Why are the Guangdong bandits unscrupulous like this? One reason lies in the fact that they have easy access to military weapons, which even pose with advantage against the official army."[47] The number of bandit-held guns soared following the end of the 1911 revolution. Before the revolution, the revolutionary organizations led by Sun Yat-sen and other anti-Qing groups were lumped together as the Revolutionary Alliance. Before and after

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[44] Zhang Zhidong 張之洞, *Zhang Wenxiang Gong Quanji* 張文襄公全集 (Collections of Zhang Zhidong) (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1965), 25/10a.

[45] "Lun Guangdong daofei zhi duo 論廣東盜匪之多" (On the frequent banditry in Guangdong), *Shenbao*, January 1, 1897.

[46] The Chinese Machinery Association estimated in 1915 that the number of bandits in Guangdong reached 300,000. However, another newspaper account estimated in 1926 that Guangdong had at least 110,000. See "Guangdong zhi xingye mindao wenti 廣東之興業民道問題" (The problem of banditry in Guangdong), *Huazi Ribao*, April 6, 1915; "Guangdong Feihuo zhi Gaikuang 廣東匪禍之概況" (The survey of banditry in Guangdong), *Guowen zhoubao*, May 16, 1926.

[47] "Lun Guangdong Duodao 論廣東多盜" (On the prevalence of bandits in Guangdong), *Shenbao*, February 1, 1894.

1911, thousands of bandits were recruited by the revolutionaries to overcome the deficiency of troops. These bandits were known as people's armies (民軍 minjun), which proved fatal in enhancing Sun's military power in Guangdong. Recruiting bandits, most of whom knew how to master guns, helped "cut short the laborious process of recruiting and training."[48] The Revolutionary Alliance always distributed numbers of firearms to these bandit armies. In the name of revolution, many of the *minjun* could thus justify their acquisition of weapons and the recruiting of peasants as bandits. However, as an irregular army, these recruiting bandits could only be used to fulfill some immediate tasks when necessary. After the military campaign, as Phil Billingsley has pointed out, many of these *minjun* returned to their outlaw world, contributing to the severity of banditry in local society.[49] In 1912, the newly established government which lacked the resources to maintain the health of its troop disbanded the *minjun* immediately after the Revolution. Nevertheless, successive governments of Guangdong were not able to collect the weapons once carried by the dismissed army. Canton's *Minsheng Ribao* 民生日報 reported in 1912 that these bandits in *minjun* "always carried their guns away with them, while very few were confiscated by the regular army."[50] Many of these dismissed soldiers either continued their banditry or other "heterodox" activities with their guns, or even sold their weapons to other bandits.[51] The end result is that these *minjun* members who carried off their guns contributed to the diffusion of guns in local society.

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[48] Diana Lary, *Warlord Soldiers: Chinese Common Solders 1911-1937* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 63.

[49] Phil Billingsley, *Bandits in Republican China*, 38.

[50] "Luojing zhi langbei 羅景之狼狽" (The difficult situation in Luojing), June 14, 1912.

[51] For example, in 1919, one branch of the warlord Long Jiguang was defeated by another Guangxi warlord. The defeated soldiers sold their guns to the local bandits, or even joined their

How many guns were in the hands of bandits? An official document estimated that at least 170,000 guns were held by bandits by 1927.[52] In the 1920s, Socialist He Xiya 何西亞 discovered that these bandits had organized into larger gangs based on geographical region. These well-organized gangs became major consumers of guns and other firearms. In 1926, the Canton Municipal Police learned that eight major gangs operating around the Pearl River Delta region owned more than seven thousand guns, most of which were modern rifles and pistols. Some bandits were even equipped with cannons and machine guns.

ranks. See Guangdong wenshi ziliao bianjibu, *Jiuguangdong Feidao Shilu* 舊廣東匪盜實錄 (The records of bandits in the old Guangdong) (Canton: Guangzhou chubanshe, 1997), 42.

[52] Guangdong Difang Wuzhuang Tuanti Xunlianyuan Yangchengsuo 廣東地方武裝團體養成所 (The Institute of Training Armed Groups of Guangdong), ed. "Suqing Guangdong de Tufei Fangfa jiqi Shanhou 肅清廣東的土匪方法及其善後" (The approaches of suppressing bandits and the steps thereafter), N.P., 1926, 22.

Bandit Head	Region	Number of Bandits	Number of Guns
Wu Sanjing	Shunde, Nanhai	More than 1,000	More than 1,000
Waizui Yu	Shunde, Fanyu	800	1,000
Liu Lian	Shunde	600	800
Hu Ba	Shunde	500	600
Chen Jin	Dongguan	200	Revolver 60-70; rifle 200
Zhujing Hai	Shunde	800	1,000
Liu Fazai	Dongguan	300-400	4 machine guns; 45 revolvers; rifle 300
Chen Damao	Dongguan	300	Rifle 200; revolver 30-40
Modawang Zhang	Dongguan	1000	1000 rifle; 100 revolver

Table 3: Bandits and their Arms in the Pearl River Delta[53]

Almost the same time, Japanese businessmen Chōdo Shibuya conducted another investigation of the sixty-three bandit groups in Guangdong. His fieldwork report detailed not only the geographical diffusion of banditry, but also the type and quantity of weapons they used.

[53] "Geshu Tangkou Diaocha 各屬堂口調查" (The survey of different bandit groups), *Guangzhou Minguo ribao*, November 2, 1926.

According to Shibuya, all the bandits in these gangs were armed with at least one firearm, which mostly consisted of rifles and even included machine guns and cannons.[54]

Gang Heads	Numbers of Bandits	Numbers of Weapons
Yuan Guangzhao	3,800	17 machine guns, 3 cannons, and more than 3,000 rifles
Mai Bao	200	2,000 small arms
Lin Cai	400	450 rifles, 9 machine guns
Lin Yunmin	500	500 rifles and pistols
Lei Gongquan	600	700 rifles and pistols

Table 4: Bandits and Their Arms in Guangdong in 1925

Continuous warfare, unbridled banditry, and widespread lineage feuding were all important manifestations of social violence, which were deeply rooted in Guangdong society. Historians unanimously ascribe the origins of these violent acts to the complex social circumstances, such as natural disasters, unbalanced resource distribution, and population increase. All these factors, as historian Joseph Lee asserts, gave rise to "a wide range of heterodox practices," and helped create "a regional subculture of fear, dissidence and insecurity." The absence of effective government control from the late Qing, and, more remarkably, the introduction of powerful firearms made the already violent situation even worse.

[54] Chōdo Shibuya, 135-44.

Circulation Mechanism

Nowhere were guns more easily accessible than in Guangdong. The analysis of these guns' profound social implication requires an investigation of how these weapons were introduced and circulated in Guangdong society. Because most weapons flowed through clandestine channels, a detailed grasp of the whole trade and diffusion network cannot be documented with any precision. However, as the web of gun circulation thickened, the active participants of the network left historical traces in newspapers, criminal cases, and witness reports, providing a lens through which to glimpse the gun's circulation mechanisms. In some circumstances, these modern firearms got scattered in a way that shared many characteristics as other commodities did– that is to say, by formal trade or official distribution to the sanctioned populace. Authorized militia forces largely obtained firearms through an officially approved and orthodox channel. Comparatively, bandits, violent lineages, and other unauthorized individuals who had no means to obtain guns from government and thereby objectively encouraged smuggling and trafficking across society, joined with weapons manufacturers and dealers to form an underground circulation network.

Orthodox Sources

As we have seen in chapter two, the late Qing government did not seek to jealously defend its monopoly on the production or use of weapons. Ushering in the period of social instability, many Guangdong officials saw putting guns in the hands of the law-abiding people as an effective method to defend localities, where state presence was always negligible. The Guangdong government had allowed the import of massive firearms by the approved militia. Existing sources suggest that obtaining the official permission to buy weapons was not difficult. For example, in 1903, the Guangdong Logistic Bureau (廣東軍需局 Guangdong Junxuju)

approved the request submitted by Xinning County to procure 1550 rifles from Hong Kong to support the organization of a militia.[55] The early Republican Guangdong governments continued to give permission to the officially sanctioned militia units to obtain necessary firearms. The Canton Merchant Association whose behavior later appeared rebellious in the eyes of Sun Yat-sun, had no difficulty to get approval to buy large numbers of firearms from foreign countries. Sun's new regime established in 1924 approved the Corps' request to purchase 4850 foreign guns and more than one hundred millions bullets from overseas sources.[56] The Merchant Corps declared that "the request to order firearms had been consistently approved by the Guangdong government before. When Long Jiguang was the provincial governor before the 1920s, they bought guns through local foreign trading companies. During Chen Jiongming's period, their request had never been rejected."[57]

In addition to procuring guns from overseas sources, the government in many cases also sold the firearms to the indigenous militia forces directly. The state-owned Guangdong Arsenal was established in 1873 as one of the consequences of the Self-strengthening Movement, and continued to operate in the Republican period. We have little evidence to indicate how extensively the arsenal's weapons armed the regular soldiers, but there is some evidence that successive rulers of Guangdong were largely dependent on non-Chinese sources.[58] The less

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[55] "Guangdong Liwuju zhaohui jiulong guanshui si bai 廣東厘務局照會九龍關稅司" (The notice from the Guangdong Logistic Bureau to the Jiulong Custom), Guangdong Custom Archives, Guangdong Provincial Archives, 508.

[56] Xianggang Huazi Ribaoshe, comp., *Guangdong kouxiechao, juan* 2*:* 8.

[57] Ibid., *juan* 2*:* 172.

[58] See Anthony B. Chan, *Arming the Chinese: The Western Armaments Trade in Warlord China, 1920-1928.*

sophisticated weapons manufactured by the Arsenal found their ways to the local militia forces. In 1915, the county magistrate of Gaoyao 高要, on the behalf of local elites who were actively organizing militia forces, submitted his request to the provincial government to obtain traditional five thousand bird guns and two hundred bullets for each gun. In the same year, as a local newspaper reported, "almost all the counties send their officials to Canton to purchase guns of by the hundreds and thousands."[59] In 1924, the Guangdong Arsenal set a statute, which allowed the local militia forces to order guns directly from the arsenal, only if they obtained the approval letter from the provincial government.[60] The new statute largely simplified the procedure, under which local militia forces no longer awaited approval from various levels of government to purchase weapons on their behalf. After that, as the *Republican Daily News* reported, many militia leaders poured into the arsenal to select the weapons they preferred.[61] However, the provincial government always took their request into cautious consideration. As suggested in chapter two, though local armed forces were seen as extensions of state power, they also suffered from scepticism from the government, which feared their monopoly over deadliest form of weaponry would be challenged. For example, in the June of 1924, Datang 大塘 township applied to purchase more than one hundred modern rifles. Because the amount of firearms owned by militia were all registered and were visible to the government, the government rejected their

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[59] "Ji cunban tuan you jin yu qiangzhi 今村辦團有今與槍支" (Organizing militia and obtaining guns), *Huaguobao* 華國報, March 27, 1915.

[60] "Binggongchang xinding mintuan lingqiang zhangcheng 兵工廠新定民團領槍章程" (The new statute of obtaining guns from the arsenal), *Qishier hang shangbao* 七十二行商報 (Commercial News of Seventy-two Guilds), April 11, 1024.

[61] "Gexian mintuan lingqiang zhi yongyue 各縣民團領槍之踴躍" (The militia forces of each county were active in obtaining guns), *Guangzhou minguo ribao*, July 12, 1924

request, for it was aware that the town "had plenty of guns already, and additional firearms were not applicable."[62]

Heterodox Sources

Smuggling from Hong Kong and Macau. As addressed in Chapter two, Macau during the Qing dynasty was as a major source of firearms for Guangdong. Macau's position was still there, and Hong Kong, due to its status as a British colony, became another important site that facilitated firearm transition. In 1904, the governor-general of Liangguang Cen Chunxuan (岑春煊 1861-1933) sent a memorial to the court, in which he was extremely worried about the illicit firearm transaction in Hong Kong. "The eastern region of Guangdong was known as a cradle of banditry. When the place was open for foreign trade, commercial ships came and brought in so many foreign guns. These bandits and outlaws had no difficulty obtaining these powerful weapons."[63] The firearm transaction generated a huge amount of profit. In the late Qing, "an ordinary Mauser was worth only 40 taels of silver. The bandits who got the guns in Hong Kong or Macau resold them for a hundred taels each."[64] In the early Republic, a foreign Remington rifle could be bought in Hong Kong for only ten or more *yuan*, Once it was resold in the interior,

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[62] "Qingling tuanqiang xu chaming banli 請領團槍須查明辦理" (The request to purchase militia firearms must be investigated), *Guangzhou minguo ribao*, June 18, 1924.

[63] . "Yuedu Dianzhi Waibu 粵督電致外部" (The telegraph to the Military of Foreign Affairs from the Governor of Guangdong), *Dagong bao*, July 6, 1905.

[64] "Siyun Bokezhe Fenfen Bujue 私運駁殼者紛紛不絕" (The Smugglers of Mausers would not stop), *Huazi ribao*, June 14, 1913.

the price could rise to one hundred *yuan*. Thereafter, many outlaws and even ordinary peasants poured into Hong Kong or Canton's foreign concessions to stockpile guns for huge profits."[65]

The existing sources from Guangdong Customs suggest that the local government was not able to stamp out the illicit firearm transactions. In 1913, the Guangdong customs commissioner received tons of reports indicating gun smuggling occurred frequently from Hong Kong to Guangdong. However, the Customs thought investigating these cases was the authority of local police, rather than the Customs, which, as suggested by its working documents, never sought to deal with these smuggling cases.[66] However, due to the constant civil war and the breakdown and government change in early Republican Guangdong, both the local police and government never took serious actions in investigating these smugglers. As a local newspaper reported in 1925, the guns could be sold and transferred in Guangdong freely without any restrictions. Even though the policy of forbidding firearm smuggling was written in the law, as the Guangdong Gongbei Customers claimed, "these policies were futile, because it was hard to implement." Jing Rao, a local official, complained that "most of the guns carried by the bandits were even better than the military weapons. Almost all of them were bought in Hong Kong and Macau." As shown above, local militia forces had to obtain governmental approval before their weapon procurement. However, many criminal cases that some militia forces even sought to these illegal weapons once their request was rejected by the government. For example, in 1914,

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[65] Wang Yanwei 王彦威, comp., *Qingji waijiao shiliao* 清季外交史料 (Historical materials on foreign relations of the Qing period), *juan* 3, 3233.

[66] Guangzhou Haiguan Bianzhi Bangongshi 廣州海關編制辦公室 (The Office of the history of Guangdong Customs), *Guangzhou Haiguanzhi* 廣州海關志 (The Gazeteer of Guangdong Customs) (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1997, 265).

the Customs found large numbers of firearms on a ship. Later, it was investigated that these firearms were bought by militia in Nanhai and Sanshui counties.[67]

Starting from the mid-nineteenth century, Hong Kong was an especially convenient inlet for arms transaction, with countless sources like Winchester, Victors and many others for both wealthy individuals, Merchant Corps, rural militias, and outlaws to approach. As one correspondant reported in the English newspaper, the *China Weekly Review* in the early 1920s, "[A]rms smuggling facilities in China have been so perfected that business is transacted in arms almost in the same convenient way as other commodities." "Any general who wants to buy can always get in touch with an agent [in Hong Kong], and there are so many foreigners and Chinese engaged in smuggling both in the treaty ports and in interior towns that one wonders how China can ever get her house in order."[68]

Transfer from Military Weapon to Civilian Weapon. Ready access to weapon was facilitated by the frequent civil warfare of early Republican Guangdong. Defeated or deserting soldiers in the period's frequent battles often carried their guns away with them; other soldiers simply abandoned their firearms on the battlefield, which were then picked up later by local people. The result was a steady diffusion of weapons into local society. In the late Qing period, revolutionaries like Sun Yat-sen and Huang Xing always regarded Guangdong as their site that launched anti-Manchu revolutions. Most of their weapons were imported from Japan through

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[67] "Huanling Renmin Ziwei Qiangzhi Zhizhao Zhi Bugao 還領人民自衛槍支執照之佈告" (The Bulletin of exchanging gun licenses for self-defense guns), *Guangzhou Minguo ribao*, August 15, 1925.

[68] "Gun Smuggling in Hong Kong," *The China Weekly Review*, March 25, 1925.

Macau.[69] After the revolution, most guns found their way into the hands of bandits. The late Qing official Zhang Jinfang in Guangdong's Jiangmen 江門 county recalled "the rebels'major inlet of firearms was in Macau. Once the gun came through, they were obtained by bandits." [70]

When Sun-yat-sen established his Guangdong revolutionary government in 1911, he organized the bullies and other armed forces scattered in local counties. These armed forces, were encouraged to participate in Sun's revolutionary army. Sun also sent them much-needed weapons. After the battles, these *minjun* were quickly dissolved. However, as many witness accounts suggest, these armed members carried their guns away with them. As the local newspaper recorded, "very few guns were turned in after the 1911 revolution."[71] No further sources exisited speculating on the future of these armed individuals who once helped strengthen Sun's revolutionary initiatives. Some of them joined the local militia or merchants corps, while many of them sold their weapons to other outlaws.

Even after the 1911 Revolution, the social disorder was not calmed down immediately. Many defeated or deserting soldiers did not turn in their weapons. In 1917, the acting Guangdong government issued an order requiring local government to collect these guns. "Our province in the past few years witnessed ceaseless warfare, the regular troops lost large amounts of guns, many of which found their way into the hands of non-military individuals."[72] Because guns and bullets were regarded as invaluable commodities, many civilians, worked to obtain

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[69] See Marius B. Jansen, *The Japanese and Sun Yat-sen* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1954).

[70] "Jiangmen xiedou 建門械鬥" (Feuding in Jianmen), *Dagong bao,* September 12, 1904.

[71] "Shenhe Raoluan 瀋河擾亂" (Incident in Shenhe), *Dagong bao*, August 10, 1904.

[72] "Shishi yaowen 時事要聞" (The major news), *Dagong bao*, April 7, 1912.

guns for self-defense or profit. In 1919, one of the branches of Long Jiguang's army, was defeated by other local predatory warlords. But the defeated soldiers sold their guns to Li Fulong, a bandit leader in Eastern Guangdong, while many soldiers just simply joined the bandits with their guns. In 1925, Chen Jiongming's army was defeated by Sun Yat-sen's army. Peng pai, a communist cadre, was ordered to collect weapons left by Chen Jiongming's defeated army. As Peng later remembered, many of these guns were lost or just collected by local peasants. He only received 300 rifles on the battlefield.[73] In the meantime, many soldiers also engaged in illicit gun transactions. The *Guangzhou Minguo ribao* reported in 1924 that it was common for ordinary soldiers to sell their weapons directly to the peasants or even bandits. Even some military commanders also helped transfer the guns manufactured by the Canton arsenal to other non-military people and earn huge profit because the price difference. [74]

The Manufacture of Small Arms in local villages. While many guns transferred from the military or smuggled from Hong Kong or Macau found their way into local society, a large number of inferior guns were manufactured in local workshops. Before the 1920s, many guns circulated by civilians or bandits were low-quality local guns or bird guns. It is difficult to find sources the exact number of these guns made by people themselves. Many newspaper accounts proved the existence of such guns. In 1924, the local government of Gaoyao County found that there was a workshop manufacturing guns in a village and collected thousands of bird guns as well as many inferior foreign guns. In the same year, a military militia leader of Nanhai County

[73] Ye Zuoneng and Cai Fumou, *Hailufeng Nongmin Yundong* 海陸豐農民運動 (Peasant movement in Hailufeng) (Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 1993), 143.

[74] "Shibing Sishou Qiangxie 士兵私售槍械" *Guangzhou Minguo ribao*, August 24, 1924.

operated one such small workshop and produced hundreds of machine guns. Two years later, the local official of Shunde County also found out the county had "at least seven such workshops."[75]

Even in Canton, where there was no difficulty obtaining advanced foreign guns through foreign trading companies or nearby Hong Kong, privately operated manufacturers were found there. According to a local newspaper report, on the south side of Canton, an arsenal hired lots of workers, whose duty was to make various types of guns. "Each worker was able to get 2 *yuan* for each gun he made."[76] In the meantime, some small trading agencies connected the gun manufacturers with their potential consumers. As for the consumers, the Guangdong police found that many consumers were bandits and other outlaws. All of these accounts suggest that gun manufacturing and circulation became an active and profitable business in Guangdong during the early Republican period.

The Formation of the Canton Merchants' Volunteer Corps

Militia Forces in the Formation of Modern Guangdong

As suggested above, the particularity of Guangdong's social ecology gave rise to a provincial subculture of violence and insecurity, which led to a proliferation of local militia units. These defensive forces, as we already know, were organized by the local gentry but under official supervision. The formation of local militia force was nothing new to Guangdong society. As Frederic Wakeman aptly puts it, during the First Opium War between the Qing and British Empire, the Guangzhou gentry organized militia operating independently of the Qing government to rout the British invaders bravely. It was during the Taiping Rebellion in the late

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[75] Ibid.

[76] "Guangdong minqiang fanlan 廣東民槍氾濫," *Guangzhou minguo ribao*, April 1, 1924.

1850s that the wheel of local militarization accelerated, as local elites and government engaged in a joint effort to forge local militia that defended local communities."[77] Unlike what Edward McCord argues in his seminal work on modern Hunan province, the militarization of Guangdong society of the late nineteenth century remained a constant condition that lasted into the early Republican period.[78] The erosion of social order and the rise of popular movements made the formation of collective -defense necessary. By the early 1920s, the militia units of Guangdong, including both rural militias and urban Merchants' Corps were widespread in various counties. According to one official statistic, the total number of militiamen by 1927 reached approximately 3,000,000 [79]

What were the major contributing factors to the flourishing of militia and militia-like units in modern Guangdong? Li Fulin who himself used to be a bandit and later joined Sun Yat-sen's entourage, was appointed the Commissioner of the provincial militia bureau in 1924. In his inauguration address, Li attributed the proliferation and rapid expansion of militia units to three major reasons: political turmoil and social unrest, the existence of a large wealthy population, and the easy availability of firearms.[80] Of the major militia units, the Canton Merchants' Corps was arguably the most influential and ambitious forces in the province, which was not only

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[77] Frederic Wakeman, *Strangers at the Gate: Social Disorder in South China, 1839-1861* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966).

[78] Edward McCord, "Militia and Local Militarization in Late Qing and Early Republican China: The Case of Hunan," *Modern China* 2 (1988): 156-187.

[79] "Dierci Daju Taolunhui 第二次大局討論會" (The second discussion on the general situation), H*ankou minguo ribao*, May 9, 1927.

[80] "Xunling gexian zhizhao suoyou geshu mintuan ru weichenglizhe keji zunzhang zuzhi qi yi chenglizhe xunsu jubao chaheyu 訓令各縣知照所有各屬民團如未成立者刻即遵章組織其已成立者迅速具報察核由" (On the order of organizing militia forces in respective county if the force has not been established, and of investigating the already formed militia forces), *Guangdong Quansheng Mintuan Yuekan* 廣東全省民團月刊, 1(1925): 935.

embodied in its consequential roles in public life, but also was shown its fierce conflict with Sun Yat-sen's revolutionary government. An exploration of the intriguing role played by this armed group offers an invaluable understanding of the complexities of the coexistence and competition of social power and government during the early Republic.

The Founding of the Canton Merchants' Corps

When the tension between Canton merchants and Sun Yat-sen's Military government was at its height in 1924, which erupted into the aforementioned bloody suppression, Xu Chongzhi (許崇智 1887-1965), the Commander-in-Chief of the Guangdong troops proclaimed that "The Merchants' Corps in Guangdong steadily became a full-fledged force since its inception. The considerable quantities of guns owned by the Corps were less common in other provinces, and even rarer in most other countries."[81] After the Merchant' Corps was brutally repressed in 1925, official discourse and nationalist scholars unanimously regarded the Corp's consistent behavior of acquiring firearms as a military conspiracy to impede Sun's revolutionary objectives.[82] While the "Canton Merchants' Corps Incident" itself has been adequately studied, comparatively less attention has been paid to the formation of the Corps and the social roles of these armed Canton merchants in urban space. If Mary Rankin was correct that these voluntary associations became a "political force" in the early Republican period possessing the potential for mobilizing local resources, then a detailed study of the merchants and Corps activism and

[81] Xianggang Huazi Ribaoshe 香港華子日報社, comp., *Guangdong kouxiechao, juan* 2*:* 74.

[82] For the Nationalist discourse on the Merchants' Corps incident, see Zou Lu, *Zhongguo guomindang shigao* 中國國民黨史稿 (A Draft History of the Chinese Nationalist Party), 1093-95.

their dynamic relationship with various ruling entities will provide insight into the origins of the later bloody conflicts.[83]

Starting from the seventeenth century, Canton's position as an important port and trading hub buzzing with frequent commercial activities has been unchanged. The city's status as a major metropolis and provincial capital with official presence was evident in many ways from the mid-Qing dynasty. It was the seat of the governor-general of two provinces, Guangdong and Guangxi. It also housed the magistrate of Guangzhou prefecture and the governor of Guangdong province during the Qing dynasty. Also, the Manchu and Chinese bannermen were stationed in the garrisons located in the suburbs of the city. The city experienced its greatest economic prosperity under the "Canton System," which was strictly controlled by the Qing government and was operated by sophisticated Hong merchants, who conducted an enormous import and export trade before the mid-nineteenth century.[84] Though Canton's position as China's sole trade center gradually gave way to Shanghai after the Opium War, it continued to function as the dominant commercial center in the wealthy Pearl Delta Region.[85]

The frequent and matured economic activities in Canton gave rise to a class of merchants who organized various voluntary associations, notably guilds to contribute to charitable or

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[83] Mary Backus Rankin, "State and Society in Early Republican Politics, 1912-28," in *Reappraising Republican China*, eds. Frederic Wakeman Jr. and Richard Louis Edmonds (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 6-27.

[84] For the Canton system, see Paul A. Van Dyke, *The Canton Trade: Life and Enterprise on the China Coast, 1700-1845* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007).

[85] After the Opium War, Canton was not industrialized as many other coastal treat port cities. British Hong Kong offered Chinese entrepreneurs greater security to operate industrial facilities. See Edward J. M. Rhoads, "Merchant Associations in Canton, 1895-1911," in *The Chinese City Between Two Worlds*, eds. Mark Elvin and G William Skinner (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), 100-01.

philanthropic projects. Before the early twentieth century, Canton merchants took parts in local affairs through the Seventy-two Guilds (七十二行 Qishier hang) and the Nine Charitable Institutions (九善堂 Jiushantang), which supported the operation of charity schools or hospitals, and directed other charitable services.[86] The local government seldom intervened in the merchants' economic and social activities in Canton, both because they assumed auxiliary functions and because they were politically weak. In 1904, two years after the Qing court launched the New Policy Reform, the Canton Chamber of Commerce, an officially authorized merchant association, was created to promote local economic development and to provide a platform for merchants to cooperate. Nevertheless, the Canton Chamber did not play the leading role that integrated various merchant organizations as expected. As Edward Rhoads suggested, its quasi-official nature and the dominant role of gentry officials in the organization would make merchants reluctant to participate in it.[87]

From the turn of the century onward, Canton merchants seemed eager to extend their independent and autonomous activities beyond the commercial and local charitable affairs. William Rowe and Frederic Wakeman's depiction of Hankou, a major commercial and transportation hub of Central China, as "a major entrepot completely under the official thumb of the government," may not be applicable elsewhere.[88] Beyond the philanthropic realm, the

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[86] Julean Herbert Arnold, eds., *Commercial Handbook of China*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C., Washington Government Printing Office, 1919), 127.

[87] Rhoads, 108.

[88] According to William Rowe, the bureaucratic administration in Hankou kept merchants from possessing the urban autonomy. See William T. Rowe, Hankow, *Commerce and Society in a Chinese City, 1796-1889* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984); Frederic E. Wakeman, "Civil Society in Late Imperial and Modern China," in *Telling Chinese History: A Selection of Essays*, ed. Lea H. Wakeman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 342.

restless political situation created many new possibilities for Canton merchants to express their political sentiments. Organized by the Nine Charitable Institutions, the Seventy-two Guilds, and the Chamber of Commerce, local merchants autonomously set up the Canton Boycott Society in 1905 against the American discriminatory treatment of Chinese immigrants one year before. As part of the nationwide Anti-American Boycott, the movement in Canton marked urban merchants' unprecedented participation in politics and indicated an expression of national consciousness among the emerging urban bourgeoisie.[89] In 1907, an independent organization, the Guangdong Merchant Self-Government Society (粵商自治會 yueshang zizhihui) was established by a group of politically minded Canton merchants. Unlike the traditional guilds or merchant associations, the Society possessed a political agenda manifested in its active role in promoting nationalism and later in the Qing court's constitutional program.[90]

As the merchants became highly organized and politicalized in the early twentieth century, they started to expand their functions at the expense of the local government. The frequent banditry and rebellions in which heavily armed individuals and militant groups loomed large disturbed local order and safety. In 1911, merchants presented a petition to local government for the establishment of the Canton Merchants' Volunteer Corps, as Shanghai did a few years before.[91] However, the Qing government, which had been frustrated by the

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[89] For the Anti-American Boycott Movement see, Sin Kiong Wong, *China's Anti-American Boycott Movement in 1905: A Study in Urban Protest* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2002).

[90] Edward J. M. Rhoads, *China's Republican Revolution: The Case of Kwangtung, 1895-1913* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 79.

[91] The Chinese Merchant Corps was founded in 1905 by the Zhejiang merchant Yu Xiaqing (1863-1945). See Parks M. Coble, *The Shanghai Capitalists and the Nationalist Government, 1927-1937* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 22-5.

Huanghuagang Uprising 黃花崗起義 one year earlier, frowned on the appearance of armed forces in the urban area and rejected their petition. As the storm of the revolution surged in Guangdong in the same year, the Canton merchants who were now resentful of the late Qing reform, became enthusiasts for the Revolution and provided heavy financial support.[92]

The founding of the Republic brought favorable changes in many areas to the merchants. In 1912, the president of the Merchants Association Chan Lim Pak (陳廉伯 1884-1944) applied to the Beiyang government in Beijing again for the permission to organize militia with privilege to carry guns for the maintenance of social order. The newly-established government seemed far more responsive to the needs of the merchants than the Qing government, and approved their request but also formulated regulations. Cen Bozhu (岑伯著 ?-1916), a well known Cantonese silk merchant and insurance agent, was elected to serve as the first commander in chief of the Corps. The formation of the Canton Merchants' Voluneer Corps was defensive in nature and aimed at protecting merchants' properity and maintaining local order. As stated in the Corps' mission statement in 1912, "The Republic is founded now, which prioritizes the local self-governance. This is the responsibility of local society, which required cooperation between government and civilians. Expanding people's politial power and strengthening people's

[92] Qiu Jie, "Guangdong shangren yu Xinhai geming" (廣東商人與辛亥革命, The merchants of Guangdong and the 1911 Revolution), *Jinian Xinhai geming qishi zhounian xueshu taolunhui lunwenji* 紀念辛亥革命七十周年學術討論會論文集 (Collected papers from the conference to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the 1911 Revolution), vol.1 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), 362-96.

physical power are essential to stamp out bandits internally, and to resist imperialism externally."[93]

When the Corps registered in 1912, it quickly recruited more than 1500 members. The expense of purchasing weapons and uniforms and other administrative spending would be shared by participating merchants.[94] Many sources of the time suggested that the training and activites of the Corps were strictly regulated. The well-known journalist Hin Wong's report provided a glimpse into how the personnel were recruited and drilled:

> The regimental quarters are scattered through the ten principal police districts of Canton and battalion quarters in important places within the district. All regimental quarters have their own homes or barracks and their total real property and common equipments in the several quarters are valued at nearly a million dollars. In order to become a member of the Corps, a candidate must become a recruit for at least six months of special drill and training taking place ususally in the mornings so as to be of convenience to the business men who have work during the day. Before one may become a recruit, he must satisfy the chief instructor that he is more than 20 and below 45 years old, recommended by two firms which will be responsble for his contribution of some $300 for his initiation fees, uniform, and arms, and must be able to pass a mental and physical examination intended to test his ability to undertake the training successflly. When a recruit is able to pass all tests and attend all the lectures and practice provide for in a course of instruction of six months, he will be given a certificate entitling him to become a regular member of the corps and receive his arms. As a rule the management of a business firm or office usually

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[93] "Yuesheng Shangtuan dunqing gechu bantuan han" (粵省善堂敦請各處辦團函, Letters from the Guangdong Merchants' Crops to establish militia forces), *Minsheng ribao*, November 15, 1912. The program of self-government was adopted by the late Qing government in 1908, as the core part of the *xinzheng* reform. Early Republican government appealed to the notion of self-government, which would be used to galvanize public support of revolution and to raise people's political consciousness. For the late government, see Ma Xiaoqun, "Local Self-Government: Citizenship Consciousness and the Political Participation of the New Gentry-Merchants in the Late Qing," in *Imaging the People: Chinese Intellectuals and the Concept of Citizenship*,1890-1920, eds. Joshua A. Fogel and Peter G. Zarrow (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1997), 183-211.

[94] "Shangtuan fensuo dajiyi 商團分所大計議" (Suggestions on the Merchants Corps and its branches), *Minsheng ribao*, November 15, 1912.

> pays for an keeps the arms, allowing its representative to take them out when required for duty. A few firms have as many as thrity men in the Corps.[95]

A member of the Corps recalled decades later that the recruitment was open to the public and the selection criteria were relatively low. However, the entrance restrictions still existed as a high entry fee and two endorsements from local merchants were required to ensure the morality of the members. Thus, most Corps members were hired by participating merchants and joined the Corps on the behalf of their employers. A uniform, official badge, and two firearms, including one rifle and one short pistol were purchased by the Corps. All the members were allowed to purchase one additional gun at their own expense.[96] After joining the Corps, they were required to participate in military training, including shooting twice per week.

The purchase of the firearms was coordinated by the commanding officer. Neither rifles nor pistols were of standard specifications because the supply of weapons came from a mixture of sources. Compared with militia forces in other inland provinces, the Corps in Canton possessed the advantages of both the ready accessibility of arms supply and affordability of high-quality weapons. As they did routinely, the Corps had to gain permission from the ruling government. As declared by the Corps during the dispute with Sun Yat-sen, most ruling governments never denied their request. The purchase of large-scale weapons was mostly dependent on non-Chinese sources, while only on rare occasions did the Corps purchase from the

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[95] Hin Wong, "The Volunteer Corps in Kwangtung," *The China Weekly Review*, December 22, 1923.

[96] Lin Fang, "Wo canjia shangtuan de jingguo 我參加上團的經過" (My process of joining the Crops), *Guangzhou wenshi ziliao* 廣州文史資料 (Canton historical materials) 7 (1963): 98. According to the document, the entry fee was $500, higher than amount provided by Hin Wong.

warlords or local government. Foreign arms dealers in Hong Kong where firearms were freely available ensured the supply of arms.[97]

The popularity of the Corps among Canton dwellers and merchants was particularly prompted by its active role in maintaining public order and civic life. Amidst the social chaos and political turbulence of the early Republican period, the Corps was particularly welcomed by the participating Canton merchants who believed their interests and properties would be protected when the power– shifting governments failed to bring social stability. Politics in early Republican Canton were quite complex because various actors fought to claim their political legitimacy. After the failure of Sun Yat-sen's "Second Revolution" in 1913, Yuan Shikai, the nominal president of China based in Beijing, obtained control over Guangdong, and appointed Long Jiguang as the military governor of Guangdong. His troops in Canton had brought nothing but disaster upon the people. To consolidate his control over the city, Long ordered his troops to implement a "city-cleansing" campaign to exterminate the defeated Guangdong Army (*yuejun* 粵軍). However, as many Canton newspapers reported, people's complaints surfaced about the abusive behaviors of Long's five thousand soldiers, who not only plundered and looted merchants' properties but also seriously disturbed public order. A local police officer represented this chaotic social situation and the impotence of the Canton police in his poem:

> New and fragile the Republic was born,
> Harnessing the lawless became a heavy duty.
> Crime and violence occurred day and night.

[97] *Xianggang Huazi Ribaoshe*, comp., *juan* 2*:* 172. According to Anthony B. Chan, most arsenals in China during the early Republican periods were controlled by respective warlords who were unable to provide arms to non-affiliated groups. See Anthony Chan, *Arming the Chinese*, 107.

But few fugitives escaped from justice.[98]

Even the Canton police department, which was established in 1902 and survived the early Republic, was not able to contend with the ruthless and violent warlord soldiers.[99] Right after Long Jiguang and his soldiers took over Canton in 1913, he immediately ordered the execution of the chief of police Chen Jinghua (陳景華 ?-1913), a major opponent to his leadership. The Canton police thereafter became a puppet force controlled by the warlords.[100] The impotence of the police objectively amplified the influence of the Corps which, with their more sophisticated guns in hands, played an increasingly important role in protecting the merchants and their shops.[101] As a Canton merchants later recalled, the Corps members had committed to patrolling the streets in the major commercial district. As another Corps member wrote, bandits and other urban outlaws who were armed with guns, dared not to rob or attack merchants' factories, with the better-armed Corps' members standing guard outside the stores and factories.[102]

In addition to the designated function as the defender of merchants' properties, the Canton merchants, now with military power in hands, strengthened their traditional roles in

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[98] Citied in Hanmin Liu, *The Transnational History of a Chinese Family: Immigrant Letters, Family Business, and Reverse Migration* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 75.

[99] The Canton policing organ was established in 1902 as a part of nationwide police reforms in the spirit of the Meiji Restoration. The Canton police department later replaced the gentry-led *baojia* (mutual-responsibility) organization. "Gaishe junjing 改設軍警" (The establishment of police force), *Huazi ribao*, January 9, 1903.

[100] "Wuhu wuyue zhentan zhi saorao 嗚呼吾粵偵探之騷擾" (The harassment of Canton's detectives), *Huazi ribao*, October 29, 1913.

[101] "Chen Bolian qiren yu shangtuan shibian 陳廉伯其人與商團事變" (Chen Lianbo and the Merchants Corps Incident), *Guangzhou Wenshi Ziliao* 廣州文史資料 (Canton historical materials) 7 (1963): 44.

[102] Li Yaofeng, "Wo shi zenyang canjia shangtuan de 我是怎樣參加商團的" (How do I join the Corps), *Guangzhou wenshi ziliao* 7 (1963): 95-96.

organizing disaster relief or maintaining social order. In 1915, for example, the city had a flood inundating the greater part of the city. Because of its thorough organization and its possession of arms, the Corps members were able not only to undertake relief measures, but also to protect the citizens from being encroached upon by outsiders who would not hesitate to take advantage of their neighbor's misfortune.[103]

Another factor contributing to the Corps' high recognition among the city's residents was that it also provided patronage to local religious sites. In the early 1920s, when Sun Yat-sen was in search of money to finance his revolutionary government and mount the Northern Expedition, he decided to expropriate the property of local temples in Canton, which provoked outrage and fierce resistance among religious adherents.[104] Local elites who set up and managed the temples sought help from powerful organizations to defend their temples. For example, in September of 1923, an intense confrontation happened between the patrons of the Twin Temples of the Chicken Market (雞欄孖廟 *jilan mamiao*) and the government, which planned to sell the temple to another owner for commercial use. Annoyed by the government's expropriation activities, the owners of the temple then designated it as the quarters of the second division of the Merchants' Corps, hoping the Corps' intervention would deter government from selling their temple.[105] When the new owner, bolstered by local government now, prepared to take over the temple, the leaders of the Merchants' Corps immediately intervened, who were determined to defend the temple with their manpower and weapons. The Canton merchant community on the next day

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[103] Wong, "The Volunteer Corps in Kwangtung."

[104] See C. K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of Their Historical Facts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970).

[105] Shuk-wah Poon, *Negotiating Religion in Modern China: State and Common People in Guangzhou, 1900-1937* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2011), 52.

threatened to launch a strike and to form a military alliance with other city's Corps if the government refused to compromise. The stalemate lasted several days, and was not settled until Liao Gongchao (廖公超 1890-?), the general of the Yunnan Army, mediated the conflict by purchasing the temples from the government and then donating them to the merchant community. In the early 1920s Guangdong, as Shuk-Wah Poon aptly puts it, the use and expropriation of temple property to further revolutionary activities were quite common, which "inevitably led to clashes of interest between the political regime and these communal groups."[106] The Merchants' Crops which had expanded dramatically to a force that exceeded 20,000 armed members and was armed with sophisticated imported weapons, became an indispensable social power, serving as both protectors of local community and challengers of the government authority. [107] An equilibrium between the Corps and political regime was on the verge of collapse.

Breaking the Equilibrium between the Corps and Government

The Conflicts between the Merchants Corps and Government

In late 1923, Sun Yat-sen successfully took over most of Guangdong province and made Canton the headquarters of his planned Northern Expedition. The Canton people seemed accustomed to seeing different militarists move in and out of the city and province: commercial activities continued to develop though against the backdrop of political instability, while the Merchants' Corps functioned well in maintaining civic order as designed. In the eyes of Sun and his alliance, the Canton merchants and their well-equipped Merchants' Corps were important

[106] Ibid., 53.

[107] "Quanyue shangtuan dahui zhi jingguo 全粵商團大會之經過," (Reports on the Convention of Merchants' Corps in Guangdong), *Shenbao*, June 7, 1924.

social forces to be reckoned with. These wealthy merchants' dominant roles in most civic organizations were visible, and the financial resources in their hands were indispensable in state building. On 14 January 1924, Dr. Sun Yat-sen gave a passionate speech at a joint meeting of representative members of the Canton police force and the Merchant Corps, in which he underscored the potential for collaboration and partnership between the two forces. While recognizing the awkwardness that his government was unable to monopolize police force in the city, Sun advocated a concerted effort to maintain order in Canton:

> "You gentlemen of the merchant corps and the police have come together in one place in welcome. In the future, the Merchants' Corps and the police must work together to maintain order in Canton. The police are a government organ. The merchant corps is a civic organ (*renmin di diguan*). Today is the first day the merchant corps and the police have met formally face to face. That is, it is the first day the government and the people are joined. Gentlemen, since this is the territory of the revolutionary government, both (parties) ought to enter into an open and honest (relationship). The party of the revolution is using Canton as its fountainhead. As a new Chinese republic is constructed, the government and the people must work together. The people of Canton municipality must cooperate with the government."[108]

As discussed above, the Canton Merchants and their Corps were able to maintain a political neutrality from the 1910s to the early 1920s with the shifting militarists, who rarely intervened in the internal affairs of the merchant community. When Sun's armies returned to Canton with the help of the Yunnan and Guangxi troops in 1923, Sun, like many of his rivals, recognized well-equipped merchants would be an important force to cooperate. However, a couple months later, Sun, in a radical turn, blamed the merchants bitterly and accused them of

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[108] Sun Yat-sen, "Geming zai zuihou yiding chenggong 革命在最後一定成功" (The revolution will succeed in the long run), 14 January 1924, in *Guofu quanji* 國父全集 (Collected works of the Father of the Nation) (Taipei: jindai zhongguo chubanshe, 1989), vol. 3, 402-407. The translation comes from David Strand, "Calling the Chinese People to Order: Sun Yat-sen's Rhetoric of Development," in *Reconstructing Twentieth-century China: State Control, Civil Society, and National Identity*, eds., Kjeld Erik Brodsgaard and David Strand (New York: Claredon Press, 1998), 57.

"colluding with imperialism and confronting government authority."[109] As discussed above, Sun came to believe that the merchant community, with its prominent social and economic power, was defying the revolutionary government's authority. In August, Sun Yat-sen's Canton government seized the merchants' weapons purchased from a British company. The incident caused the confrontation to escalate, which finally brought both sides into the aforementioned armed attack in October of that year.

How would the cooperative relationship between the government and the Canton merchants anticipated by Sun become undone in 1924? What are the essential reasons for the conflicts that led to the above-mentioned strikes and bloody armed confrontations in October? A rich literature has dealt with the reasons for the conflict. Historians like C. Martin Wilbur, Stephanie Po-yin Chung, and Michael G. Murdock, in their works on Sun Yat-sen's early career and Canton merchants, attributes three reasons for the controversy.

First, Canton merchants from the beginning did not have a penchant for Sun Yat-sen's Nationalist Revolution. In 1923, Sun Yat-sen returned to Guangdong, with the help of the extra-provincial mercenaries, and successfully chased Chen Jiongming, who had previously allied with Sun. The extra-provincial mercenaries were composed of soldiers from Yunnan and Guangxi provinces. The commanders of the "guest armies," in the eyes of Canton merchants, did not benefit Guangdong, but levied heavy taxes on the merchants to support their troops.[110] As suggested by the British Consul-General in Canton, the guest armies extorted a large amount of tax money from the province. In 1923, "a sum of $100,000,000 was wrung out of the City in the

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[109] Sun Yat-sen, *Sun Zhongshan Quanji* 孫中山全集 (The Collection of Sun Yat-sen's works) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006), 58.

[110] Tsin, *Nation, Governance, and Modernity in China*, 54.

shape of taxes both regular and irregular… the balance of $70,000,000 having been levied by the non-Cantonese troops, chiefly the Yunnanese, who remitted the money to their province."[111]

The social and financial burden brought by the coming of the troops from other provinces made the Canton merchants recall the chaotic period when Guangdong was under the heel of a Yunnanese warlord in late 1910s. Comparatively, Canton merchants preferred Chen Jiongming, an enthusiast for anarchism and democratic federalism, whose Guangdongese troops dominated Guangdong from 1920 to 1923. Unlike Sun who was chasing the dream of China's unification under a central government, Chen conceived provincial autonomy as the direction of China's future that would facilitate citizen's political participation.[112] In 1920, Chen initiated a "Canton for the Cantonese" movement, commanding all the troops and gunboats to prevent invasion of all extra-provincial troops. His rejection of Sun's proposal to use the wealth of Guangdong to subsidize his effort for national unification was particularly welcomed by the merchant community.[113] Nevertheless, Chen's defeat by Sun and the "guest armies" in 1923 shattered their dream of provincial autonomy. Canton now once again became the headquarters of Sun's Nationalist Revolutionary Army against the Beijing warlord's government.

Second, the merchants' interests were threatened by the economic reforms launched by Sun's new regime. For a long period after the founding of the Republic, the Hong Kong dollars issued by the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank had been the major popular medium of exchange

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[111] Ku Hung-ting, *The Canton Merchants' Volunteer Corps Incident* (Singapore: Nanyang University, 1978), 5.

[112] See Leslie H. Dingyan Chen, *Chen Jiongming and the Federalist Movement: Regional Leadership and Nation Building in Early Republican China* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999).

[113] Stephanie Po-yin Chung, *Chinese Business Groups in Hong Kong and Political Change in South China, 1900-25* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), 84.

in Canton. Though the early Republican government issued official paper notes, the currency values were unstable due to the deteriorated social and political situation. In early 1924, Sun's new regime launched its program of standardizing currency, forbidding the use of foreign currency in Guangdong. Guangdong merchants had expressed concerns that the establishment of a new provincial bank, the introduction of a new currency with an uncertain reserve, and the prohibition of Hong Kong currency might adversely affect the mercantile communities.[114] In the meanwhile, heavy taxation was introduced by Liao Zhongkai (廖仲愷 1877-1925) in May 1924. He ordered the levying of a fifty percent sales tax on land transfers and also introduced several new taxes. The problem of "unifying financial administration" was launched, under which excessive consumer taxes were levied on almost every transaction, "from foodstuffs to brothels."[115] What happened following the merchants' resistance to the government's expropriation of local temples occurred again. However, the confrontation appeared more intense. In response, Chen Lianbo, now the commander in chief of the Merchants' Corps, contacted other Corps in the nearby cities and formed a federation of Guangdong Provincial Merchants' Corps.[116] The merchant community again threatened a general strike, which was now reinforced by a Federation of Merchants' Corps. It seemed Sun Yat-sen and his government at this point had not been prepared to trigger a head-on confrontation. To reassure the public and the merchant community, the government was forced to make compromise and rescind the tax.

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[114] Ibid., 108.

[115] Tsin, *Nation, Governance, and Modernity in China*, 95.

[116] "Guangzhou dabashi fengchaoxubao 廣州大罷市風潮續報" (Reports on the grand strike in Canton), *Huazi ribao*, May 30, 1924.

Third, Sun's pro-Communist stance was evident given he received both material and military aid from the Soviet Union and formed an alliance with the newly founded Chinese Communist Party.[117] One major purpose of the Nationalist Party's re-organization was to broaden its social support base as crucial to struggle for national unification and independence. In the Manifesto of the First National Congress of the Nationalist Party, Sun announced the necessity to mobilize peasants and workers as the main force in the revolutionary campaign. After the meeting, the government established the Department of Workers, Department of Peasants, Department of Youth, Department of Women, and Department of Propaganda, all of which served as coordinating media for mobilizing the masses. Nevertheless, the role of merchants and their activism in the urban area did not receive sufficient attention. Sun's pro-socialism and pro- agriculturist stance "was usually interpreted by some merchants and the enemies of the KMT as the means of the KMT to oppress the merchant class."[118] In 1923, the Canton Merchants' Association was established. Sun Yat-sen then conferred a banner on the Association, symbolizing the government's recognition. However, the merchants refused to accept it.

It was against this background that the conflicts between the Merchants' Corps and Sun's government led to the bloody confrontation a few months later. By mid-1924, the Canton Merchants' Corps was increasingly moving beyond their presupposed function of maintaining civic order in the city. Rather, the well-equipped militia forces provided the Canton merchants the condition under which they would obtain local power and challenge government authority. A

[117] See Alexander Pantsov, *The Bolsheviks and the Chinese Revolution 1919-1924* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000).

[118] Ku Hung-ting, 6.

number of confrontation activities, such as the disputes over the Twin Temples in 1923 and the economic reform in 1924, all verged on military conflicts, which later appeared to be the prologue to the bloody "Merchants' Corps Incident" in October 1924. For several decades, historians have analyzed the irreconcilability between merchants' activism in Canton and Sun Yat-sen's revolutionary blueprints. They have focused on the economic and social reasons behind the conflicts, but offered little attention to explain how these Canton merchants challenged the government authority. When the government was not the sole holder of the monopoly of violence, the merchants, who were backed by military power, sometimes forced the government to compromise.

The Merchants' Corps Incident

In May of 1924, Chen Lianbo and other leading merchants in Canton managed to build an alliance with militia forces of other commercial cities, forming the Federation of Guangdong Merchants' Corps. Chen then moved in a significant manner to strengthen the Corps' military presence by procuring a large consignment of arms. To secure the procurement, the Merchants' Corps succeeded in obtaining a permit in advance by paying the government a license fee of 100 *yuan* per gun (50,000 *yuan* in total). For decades, successive Guangdong governments regarded the issuance of gun licenses as a significant mean to raise revenue, if militia refused to procure weapons from the government directly.[119] A few days later after their request was approved, a Norwegian Freighter *SS Hav* shipped more than 9,000 small arms and some cannons from

[119] "Qingling Qiangzhao Fangfa 請領槍照方法" (Methods to apply gun license), *Guangzhou minguo ribao*, December 11, 1923.

Europe to Canton. These imported small arms included 4850 rifles, 4331 Mauser pistols, 660 revolvers with a huge quantity of ammunition.[120]

Nevertheless, it turned out that the procurement was not progressing smoothly. It was financed by the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation; Chen Lianbo was comprador of the bank's Canton branch. The arms were purchased through a German trading company in Hong Kong, and were secured in Belgium. Thereafter, they were shipped by a Norwegian freighter from Amsterdam to Canton, where they were consigned by the German firm of Saunder and Wielder.[121] However, the procurement was in light of the Arms Embargo Agreement of 1919, which was imposed by major Western powers aiming to reduce the internal fighting and to restrict foreign intervention. In this case, there would be no legal restrictions for the purchase, because governments of Norway and Germany did not sanction the 1919 Agreement.[122] The cargo was initially to be shipped to Hong Kong, a colony of Britain, which sanctioned the Agreement. However, the embargo seemed to be widely violated.[123] The Hong Kong official possessed little passion to adhere to the embargo. When the cargo was on the way to Hong Kong, Sir Reginald Edward Stubbs, the governor of Hong Kong, refused the order from the British government to stop the freighter in Hong Kong waters.[124] It was shown later the freighter deviated from the predetermined voyage route, and arrived in Canton on August 8.

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[120] Xianggang Huazi Ribaoshe, comp., *Guangdong kouxiechao, juan* 1*:* 13-46.

[121] See Wilbur, *Sun Yat-sen*, 250.

[122] The Second Historical Archives, S423-10.

[123] James E. Sheridan, *China in Disintegration*: *The Republican Era in Chinese History 1912-1949* (New York: The Free Press, 1977), 95.

[124] The Second Historical Archives, S423-11.

Upon its arrival in Canton, Sun Yat-sen immediately ordered Chiang Kai-shek to intercept the freighter and confiscate all the arms. Such a huge numbers of firearms offered Sun Yat-sen and his adherents adequate reason to suspect that Chen Lianbo was preparing a military conspiracy to expel his "revolutionary government." The merchants' community was furious about the seizure and once again, threatened a general strike until they received their weapons.[125] In a meeting between Sun Yat-sen and the Canton merchants, Sun explained to them that the total number of arms far exceeded the amount stated on the permit.[126]

On October 10, 1924, celebrations were being held in most Chinese cities to commemorate the thirteenth anniversary of the founding of the Republic of China. Known as "Double Tenth Festival (雙十節 Shuangshijie)," the national holiday was established in 1912 to celebrate the victory of the Wuchang Uprising (武昌起義 Wuchang qiyi) which overthrew both the Manchu monarchy and Qing dynasty in 1911. This year's celebration in Canton, however, was shrouded in bloody conflict, rather than joy. Crowds of locals already jammed the fair-like festivities in the early morning. When thousands of people, mainly composed of young students, workers, and military cadets paraded in the city streets with their banners and flags, what awaited them were not bursts of applause from the audience, but lethal bullets shot by armed individuals of the Canton Merchant Corps. As the parade demanded the right to march through the spot where the Corps was unloading their weapons, the exasperated Corps members refused their request, which was likely to intensify their conflict. Someone among the Corps started shooting at those bare-handed paraders, who at this moment were exposed to heavy gunfire on the street.

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[125] The Second Historical Archives, S432-11.

[126] "The Canton Merchants' Corps Incident," The *China Weekly Report*, September 24, 1924.

According to one official statistic, the deadly attack had left eight people dead, including one who was disemboweled, and hundreds wounded.[127]

History is always filled with contingency and surprise. The first shooter in the Corps would never predict that his shots triggered a large-scale armed conflict between the Canton merchant community and Guangdong government led by Sun Yat-sen. Right after the street conflict, the Canton Merchants Association issued a general strike announcement, claiming that Sun and his voracious government had been trampling Guangdong people's interests, and calling for further military action against Sun's tyrannical rule in Guangdong.[128] The armed conflict and the threat from the Canton merchant community seemed to have enraged Sun, who then decided to reassert his and his Nationalist Party's political authority in Canton through a high-handed policy to suppress and pacify the merchants' armed force. Sun immediately organized a revolutionary committee and also ordered his vice Generalissimo Hu Hanmin (胡漢民 1879-1936) to place Canton under martial law.

On the other side, the merchant community never ceded its anti-Sun activities. Not only did the Association refuse the intermediation initiated by some civic organizations and the city's General Chamber of Commerce, but it went so far as to patrol in the market to punish any non-compliant merchants. The merchants' confidence in confronting the government was by no means unrealistic. In 1912, merchants in Canton established the Corps as a private militia force equipped with imported weapons. By early 1924, the Corps had recruited more than 20,000

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[127] General accounts of the incident appear in Zou Lu, *Zhongguo guomindang shigao* 中國國民黨史稿, 1093-95. For the official statement of the incident in English, see "The Canton Tragedy," *The North China Herald*, November 1, 1924.

[128] Xianggang Huazi Ribaoshe, comp., *Guangdong kouxiechao, juan* 2*:* 319.

members in and around Canton, each of whom had undergone at least six months of drills and were armed with at least two guns.[129] During the conflict, the leading merchants warned that their armed Corps members had the prowess to expel any "outside power" and to maintain social order in Canton. The belief that his government authority was being challenged, as well as the fear of merchants' potential conspiracy with his rival Chen Jiongming whose forces had fled to eastern Guangdong after their military struggle in 1922, made Sun determined to suppress their anti-government activities through coercive military means. The tension escalated on October 15 when Chiang Kaishek (蒋介石 1887-1975) moved the cadets of the newly established Whampoa Military Academy (黃埔軍校 Huangpu junxiao) to Canton, which put the Merchants' Corps in jeopardy. Merchants' rebellion was forcibly suppressed on the same day, leading to the death of thousands of people, including Corps members and merchants, together with huge property losses. As the *China Weekly Review* reported:

> Canton has been horribly red… a Red Army of 40,000 terrorists red-washed 35 wards and streets in the Western Suburb with the blood of aged and young who were too weak to endure the rage of a Red Sun which pierced through them in the form of daggers and bayonets and kerosene oil, the power of which has left a monument of hundreds of blackened walls standing over debris, once the glory of 1600 homes and shops worth more than $25,000,000 but now a grave of 6000 innocent men, women, and children who perished.[130]

The Corps were quickly disarmed after the conflict, and their leaders declared unconditional surrender. The commander of the Corps fled to Hong Kong and never came

[129] Li Liangyu, Lin Chijun and He Muzi, "Guangzhou Shangtuan Panluan Shimo 廣州商團叛亂始末" (The origin and the end of the Canton Merchant Corps Uprising), *Guangdong wenshi ziliao*, no. 42 (1984): 242-58.

[130] Hin Wong, "Red Sun over China," *The China Weekly Review*, Novernmber 1, 1924.

back.[131] After the Incident, Sun's reputation fell to a low ebb in Canton, and criticism of his revolutionary government increased among Canton residents. The commercial situation in Guangdong deteriorated over the next few years. Merchants were reluctant to expand their business in Canton, where they believed the government provided no guarantee of their safety and property.[132] Though the suppression of the Merchants' Corps made many Cantonese hate Sun Yat-sen and his revolutionary government, Sun recognized the importance of military power and the danger of the unregulated popular forces. Soon after the suppression, Sun left Canton for his national unification campaign. What he left to Canton was a disarmed merchants community, a strengthened military, and a group of bureaucrats committed to achieving his national dream.

Conclusion

The case study of Guangdong allows us to examine the complexity of how the early Republican government coexisted with armed populace in local society. As suggested in this chapter, Sun Yat-sen, in the beginning, confronted the fact that a well-regulated force would be reckoned with. His latter action of military suppression indicated that he consciously maintained

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[131] Guo Tingyi 郭廷以, *Zhonghua Minguo Shishi Rishi* 中華民國史事日誌 (Daily records of historical events in Republican China), v.1 (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo), 833. For the detailed analysis of the suppression, see C. Martin Wilbur, *Sun Yat-Sen: Frustrated Patriot* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 258-264.

[132] After the incident, local newspapers and periodicals produced numerous polarized commentaries, either celebrating Sun Yat-sen's victory in wiping out the hostile merchants, or blaming his authoritarian repression of self-defense forces in Canton. The Hong Kong-based, pro-merchant newspaper *Huazi ribao*, for example, devoted to a series of editorials, denouncing Sun and his government's attack on the self-defense defense in order to seize local resources. For example, "Guangzhou zhengfu cuican shangtuan zhi kefen 廣州政府摧殘商團之可憤" (The anger on the trampling of the Merchants' Corps by the Guangdong government), *Huazi ribao*, August 13, 1924.

a balance between the armed people and the government, which determined the government policy towards private gun ownership could not be static and consistent.

This inconsistency could be drawn in some speeches of Sun Yat-sen in Guangdong. On July 28, 1924, amid a swarm of Canton peasants who newly joined the Nationalist Party (GMD), Sun Yat-sen, gave a passionate speech about the mobilization of peasants, in which he particularly encouraged them to empower themselves with guns in a situation in which they suffered from oppression and exploitation. Sun cited both the Hong Kong Seamen's successful strike a few days earlier that forced the Western capitalists to make a concession, and the Canton merchants, who founded the well-equipped Volunteer Corps right after the 1911 Revolution and made themselves the most prominent force in Guangdong society.[133] He said, "you peasants traditionally lack solidarity and have no recognition of the importance of organizing self-defense units. To throw off the oppression, you (peasants) must unify and form cooperatives. Able-bodied young men (壯丁 zhuangding) should be selected for conscription into the self-defense units. If so, the government could provide support and assistance by selling you guns at a reasonable price. Once you are armed and render an effective force, you will be the country's first-class masters (主人翁 zhurenweng)."[134]

Sun Yat-sen's speech championing the militarization of the Guangdong ordinary peasants ran counter to his attitudes towards the Canton merchants a few days later. In September 1924,

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[133] On the Shameen strike, see C. Martin Wilbur and Julie Lien-ying How, eds., *Documents on Communism, Nationalism, and Soviet Advisers in China, 1917-1927* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), 225-27.

[134] Sun Yat-sen, "Zai Guangzhou Nongmin Lianhuanhui de Yanshuo 在廣州農民聯歡會的演說 " (Speech in the Canton peasants gathering) in *Sun Yat-sen Quanji* 孫中山全集 (Complete works of Sun Yat-sen), vol.10 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 465.

Sun openly denounced the merchants of Canton as defectors and bandits, who defied government authority and sometimes forced the government to compromise with their military power.[135] At the time, Sun was about to stamp out the armed merchants and to exert government authority over offenders. However, in the early month of that year, Sun indeed highly appreciated the role of the Merchants' Corps in the city when his newly established government had not monopolized armed forces. In a speech to a joint meeting of the local police agency and the Corps, he used a different rhetoric by applauding the Corps which would be reckoned with in his state-building efforts.[136]

Sun Yat-sen, as historian David Strand puts it, was heavily committed to public speaking, and "was often obliged to use words" to "achieve his political goals."[137] It appeared from Sun Yat-sen's three consecutive speeches that he expressed three utterly different and mercurial attitudes towards the armed civilians. Even his attitudes to one specific group (the Canton merchants in this case) was inconsistent. He encouraged and facilitated the peasants to arm themselves; appreciated the Merchants' Corps in maintaining order in Canton; blamed the Corps later and then fiercely suppressed them. This chapter is a study of the inconsistency and fluctuation towards the armed forces in the early Republican decades. In order to show how governments' different and changing ways of dealing with armed civilians affected the dynamic of state-society relations, this chapter investigates both conflicts and collaborations behind the

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[135] Ibid., 256.

[136] Ibid., 377.

[137] For the power of Sun Yat-sen's speech, see David Strand, "Calling the Chinese People to Order: Sun Yat-sen's Rhetoric of Development," in *Reconstructing Twentieth-Century China: State Control, Civil Society, and National Identity*, Kjeld Erok Brodsgaard and David Stand, eds. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 33-68.

Canton Merchants' Corps Incident, a unique aspect of Sun Yat-sen's coercive rulership that clearly illustrates the dynamic gun control politics.

Sun Yat-sen's suppression of the armed merchants left a political legacy to the later Republican decades. With the end of the Northern Expedition in 1928, Chiang Kai-shek, the successor of Sun, endeavored to reintegrate Chinese society. Of all the policies in the way of claiming the state monopoly on violence, Chiang's Nanjing government immediately enacted a law forbidding the formation of Merchants' Corps in major commercial cities. He also made regulation policies towards private gun ownership. However, the important element of local militarization continued to exist, which appeared as the obstacles to his gun control agenda, which will be addressed in the next chapter.

~ CHAPTER FOUR~

Regulating Guns and State-building in Republican China

Introduction

After the suppression of the armed Canton Merchants in October 1924, the KMT and the National Revolutionary Army (NRA) left Guangdong province to fulfill the Nationalist unification agenda. In the summer of 1928, Chiang Kai-shek, now the Generalissimo of the NRA took his troops into Beiping, indicating the Northern Expedition had been officially concluded. China seemed to be entering a new era. The newly founded Nationalist government, now based in Nanjing was unequivocally committed to penetrating the penetration of state power into local society. Drawing lessons from the Canton Merchants' Incident and recognizing the potential threat from armed urban Corps, the Nanjing government enacted a law, seeking to restrict the development of merchants' Corps in major commercial cities.[1] Several other attempts were made to maintain social order and increase government power and authority over local society. Private gun ownership and its regulation were an integral part of the state-building project undertaken during the Nationalist era (1927-1949). Chinese officials followed gun policies adopted in the late Qing and early Republic in claiming that regulation rather than total prohibition was the best way to deal with private gun ownership.

That is to say, like their predecessors, the Nationalist era officials believed that the most effective gun policy would be placing guns in the hands of "good people (良民 liangmin)," who would use them in self-defense, while keeping them out of the hands of those who could threaten

[1] "Dushi wu zuzhi shangtuan zhi biyao an 都市無組織商團之必要案" (No necessity to organize urban merchants' Corps), Canton Municipal Archives, Zheng-584.

social order or the government's agenda. When the founding of the Nanjing government in 1927 made the extensive state-building efforts possible, the central government set out its policy regarding private gun ownership. As will be addressed below, gun registration, licensing, stamping out gun trafficking gradually became standard practice in both urban and rural areas. The purpose of this chapter is not only to review these regulation policies, though their importance was evident to assess Republican China's state-building efforts.

One goal of this chapter is to review these policies, which is essential to an assessment of Republican China's state-building efforts. Another goal is to explore how gun regulation was implemented in local society. In many cases, things did not happen as envisioned. One such case was that of Bie Tingfang (别廷芳 1883-1940), the *ad hoc* "local king" in Henan province's Ningxiang County, where he organized a militia force and operated primitive arsenals to manufacture guns and ammunition. In July 1938, Chiang Kai-shek arranged a meeting with Bie in Wuhan, the temporary capital of China at the time. In the meeting, Chiang praised him for organizing collective-defense forces in which ordinary civilians armed themselves and offered him a medal of honor. To even Bie's surprise, his status as "local king" was then officially recognized. After the meeting, Bie's initiative of arming local peasants, who used their guns to defend the communities was officially recognized. [2]

Another case happened in 1939 when China was undergoing the trauma of the second Sino-Japanese War. Chiang telegraphed Yan Xishan (阎锡山 1883-1960), a former warlord who

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[2] Neixiangxian Wenshi Ziliao Weiyuanhui 内鄉縣文史資料委員會, *Neixiang wenshi ziliao: Bie Tingfang shilu* 内鄉文史資料: 别廷芳實錄 (Local History of Neixiang County: Special Edition on Bie Tingfang) (Neixiang: Zhonagguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi, Neixiang xian weiyuan hui, 1985), 63-4. For a detailed introduction about Bie Tingfang's activities in Henan, See Xin Zhang, *Social Transformation in Modern China*.

still maintained *de facto* control in Shanxi province. Chiang issued a stern warning to Yan not to confiscate any guns from peasants to "endure harmony between government and the masses."[3]

If we examine these two cases from the lens of privately-owned guns, it becomes clear that the government in certain circumstances made concessions when regulating the armed populace. From the late 1910s, Bie Tingfang organized unsanctioned militia forces in Neixiang Country, which provided essential backing for his ambition of controlling local society. To bolster his military strength, Bie and his followers not only seized weapons from other militia forces, and also operated a number of community based arsenals to manufacture rifles and pistols.[4] Bie's private manufacturing of guns was obviously not officially sanctioned, according to the gun regulation law. Yet, this did not prevent him from receiving government recognition. Bie's domination in local power structure and active role in protecting local communities forced the government to forge a compromised relationship with him. The firearm regulation was not consistently implemented in wartime China. If the law prevented the rebels, bandits, and other outlaws from owning any firearms, Chang's order to Yan Xishan in 1938 suggested that the state made compromise by adopting a lax attitude towards armed civilians, no matter their status as law-abiding civilian gun owners or not.

These cases are two ordinary examples among many that illustrate the government's policy could be negotiated and compromised with respect to certain circumstances. Then, how do we understand the inconsistency of the government's policy towards private gun owners? As

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[3] Academia Historica, 002-090300-00205-210.

[4] Nanyang Diqu Difang Shizhi Bianzuan Bangongshi 南陽地區地方史誌編纂辦公室, ed. Nanyang Diquzhi 南阳地区志 (Gazetteer of Nanyang County), vol 2 (Zhengzhou: Zhengzhou renmin chubanshe, 1988), 3.

Edward McCord puts it, the local strongmen "might stand as obstacles to state penetration of their communities, in return for political support they could also perform as state agents for this penetration."[5] The focus of this chapter is not to repeat what previous studies have fully demonstrated that state's endeavors to penetrate local society. Using previous scholarship as baseline, this chapter seeks to examine how the proliferation of guns in local society generated political responses, as a new angle to scrutinize the dynamics between state and society. My findings indicate that although the National government were deeply committed to state-building between 1927 and 1949, it did not claim absolute monopoly of violence, but adopting a regulatory approach to cope with the private gun ownership. Nevertheless, as I will argue below, its policy was inconsistent when the strong local society, partially as a result of the proliferation of guns, precluded effective regulation, which forced the government to make concessions.

A focus on the nexus of state and armed populace in gun regulation can yield new perspectives of the Chinese society during the Nationalist era. The Nationalist government's regulatory approach towards private gun ownership allows us to examine how a weak state viewed its relations with the strong society. As discussed in the chapter two, Chinese government, since the beginning of the nineteenth century, adopted a "reliance/control" model to resolve its relationship with local power. When China was confronting both external threat and unfavorable domestic conditions, its regulation became contingent and lax. The exploration of the history of regulating guns allows us to see that modern China was concerned with establishing a balanced relation with local society. This chapter starts with an introduction about

[5] Edward A. McCord, *Military Force and Elite Power in the Formation of Modern China*, 102.

how the private gun ownership was regulated during the Republican period, and then discusses the difficulties in carrying out the regulations.

Regulating Private Gun Ownership in Republican China

From the mid-eighteenth century until the early twentieth century, the Chinese government had no interest in enacting specific legal provision empowering people to own guns in defense of themselves and their communities. As the second chapter suggested, prior to the late nineteenth century, the Qing authorities believed that there was an explicit link between firearm ownership and the increasing risk of uncontrollable violence and insurgency. Only after China experienced a successive series of foreign defeats and domestic rebellions from the late nineteenth century, did the governments see putting guns in the hands of ordinary people as being the extension of state power. The prerequisite was that armed civilians were properly trained and regulated. At the same time, the state also sought to control the supply of guns and to stamp out their use by the ones who were regarded as threats to public order and central authority. The policy of gun licensing or registration proposed by Shen Jiamen in 1908, for instance, was meant to decrease the danger of violence and to prevent any rebellious or revolutionary actions. Despite the fact that the Qing dynasty collapsed shortly after these regulatory approaches were proposed, they laid the basis for the successive governments to deal with the issue of private gun ownership.

The approach of what I term "control/reliance" continued to be adopted during the Republican period. The persistence ascribed to the common political and social circumstances that both the late Qing and Republican governments faced. The decline of the central grip forced the successive governments to cede central power to local individuals and groups, so that they could help the central authorities to maintain local order and to defeat the uprisings. At the same

time, the state also made efforts to guarantee that the empowerment should not challenge the state authority and legitimacy. The major aspects of the regulatory efforts, which aimed to place gun in the hands of the right people, were as follows.

The Surveillance over Militia's Guns and Ammunition

Not only the organization and operation of both rural and urban militia forces, but their use of weapons were also subjected to government supervision. Two years after the founding of the Republic, the Beiyang government in Beijing issued the Self-Defense Militia Decree (地方保衛團條例 Difang baoweituan tiaoli), the purpose of which are two-fold. First, the newly founded government offered legitimacy to self-defense forces and acknowledged their policing function. Second, it aimed to consolidate all local defense forces into one controllable policing body. The Beiyang government also expressed special concern over the militia use of firearms. As required by the decree, "all of the militiamen's guns should be registered to provincial government." It also added that "if new firearms were indispensable under special circumstances, the request must be approved by provincial governors."[6] The decree did not mark any significant departure from the late Qing in terms of firearm regulations. However, in a few months, the Beijing government issued another order to provincial governors, prohibiting any people or groups from acquiring guns from local governments. This marked a radical shift in gun policy, as the state was worried about an armed populace had potential to bring threat to local society. The state also concerned with the high possibility that militiamen transferred their guns to bandits resulted in a

[6] "Sheng Yihui wei geshu yujing dinggou junhuo 省議會為各屬預警訂購軍火" (The provincial council ordered firearms for paramilitary forces), *Shengjing shibao*, January 14, 1913.

grip on firearm supply. Late in the year 1914, the Beijing government ordered explicitly to ban any people from acquiring guns from local governments.[7]

Nevertheless, the Beijing government's effort at centralization of militia forces was doomed by the unwillingness to cooperate of the provincial authorities, who were seeking provincial autonomy as opposed to Yuan Shikai's central control. Yuan's order banning local government from providing firearms to militia forces was often ignored. One example of local government working to support the formation of the armed militia can be seen in the Fengtian province of Manchuria, which was under the control of warlord Zhang Zuolin. The Fengtian government initially passed the order to local counties, but soon after, the ban was lifted. The new order strongly encouraged militia forces to acquire enough weapons against malicious bandits:

> It is reported that the new militia groups are being formed, but the guns and ammunitions are not adequate in defense of the local communities. The government now requires that any respective militia should acquire weapons from government to prevent banditry, if not already prepared.[8]

The local government sponsorship of the armed militia occurred in many other places as well. In the Quzhou County of Zhili Province, "owing much to the support of local gentry, who provided fund to procure modern guns, county magistrate immediately recruited militia units and worked out the structure of the new force."[9] As discussed in chapter three, successive

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[7] "Dianchi Jinzhi Renmin Lingqiang 電敕禁止人民領槍" (To ban the civilians from obtaining guns), *Shengjing Shibao*, November 15, 1914.

[8] "Shengzhong Junhuo 慎重軍火" (Be cautious of firearms), *Shengjing Shibao*, January 9, 1913.

[9] "Quzhouxian qingling qiangxie 曲州縣請領槍械" (Quzhou County applied to obtain firearms), *Dagong bao*, August 27, 1918.

Guangdong governments barely rejected the request from local magistrates who organized local militia forces with the assistance of elite.

The effectiveness of such regulation and control efforts, however, lay in the coercive power of the state. The practice originated in the late Qing became institutionalized in the early Republican period. The establishment of the Republic in 1912 failed to bring unity and stability to an already fragile society, which had suffered from a successive series of foreign defeats and domestic turmoil. But instead, warlordism emerged as the fall of the Qing dynasty made the major check on regional autonomy vanished. Scholarly research on the emergence of warlordism has concluded that military prowess was crucial in establishing and maintaining warlords' dominant status in their respective sphere of interests.[10] Thus, the extent of their acquisition of weapons became the basis of their military dominance. Once they secured the positions of power, respective warlords made efforts to create firearm laws.

During the early Republican period, the consistent civil conflicts among warlords and the decentralization of political power made it difficult to regulate military weapons. Warlord in their respective ruling areas created a series of laws or regulations of the weapons carried by their soldiers. However, due to their ruling power never ceasing to change, these regulations were also subject to change. Nevertheless, most warlords acknowledged the potential threat posed by the runoff of their weapons. The provide a consistent view about the regulations upon military weapons, this section uses the regulation in the Manchuria as a case study, because the region remained politically stable from the 1910s to the early 1930s, when the Japan came to

[10] See Edward McCord, *Military Force and Elite Power in the Formation of Modern China.*

establish the Manchuguo. During this period, the whole region was controlled by the Zhang family and their gun control policies remained stable as well.

In late 1916, the Fengtian provincial government noticed that "the frequent banditry forced local attached armies to apply guns, rifles, and bullets to defend the threats. However, they failed to report the procession of any broken or surplus guns. The military weapon should be carefully monitored. Otherwise, the danger will follow."[11] The government ordered all the counties to report meticulously about their broken and unused weapons to avoid these weapons to be used by outlaws.[12] The government also recognized that some soldiers pawned their weapons secretly for profits, which led the government to make laws against such phenomena. A case like this was reported in the Shengyang based *Shengjing shibao* in 1919. "Zhang Zuoxiang, the garrison commander, admonished that most military weapons were owned by the country, the private transfer of which was illegal. However, some ignorant soldiers pawned them for profit. This is unreasonable. From now on, on the behalf of military government, all the pawn shop should not accept weapon." In the 1923, the commander in chief enacted another harsh laws prohibiting the military individuals from transferring their weapons by all means.[13]

In other provinces as well, the military leaders feared the diffusion of firearms from military camps to the local society. Once caught, these military weapons were confiscated immediately, and any concerned individuals should suffer from strict punishments. In 1917, the

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[11] "Zhang Dujun Shengzhong Junhuo 張督軍慎重軍火" (General Zhang was cautious of military weapon), *Shengjing shibao*, December 24, 1916.

[12] Ibid.

[13] "Yanjin Dangshang Shouzhi Qiangxie 嚴謹當商受質槍械" (To ban the pawn merchants from accepting guns), *Shengjing shibao*, October 1, 1922.

army garrisoned in Baoding 保定, the provincial capital of Zhili, found that an ordinary soldier stole two rifles and wanted to sell them to local merchants. His behaviors were found by detectives, who arrested both transaction sides.[14] The soldier later was sentenced to death. Even though local governments made their respective laws in regulating military weapons, the case of illegal transfers occurred endlessly. As we addressed before, these regulations were always futile.

During the late Qing period, as we discussed in the second chapter, local militia had to submit application to local government before purchasing weapons. Local magistrate always reviewed their applications carefully before making any decisions. In 1910, one militia of the Xiangshan County of the Guangdong Province made request to local magistrate for rifles and other firearms.[15] The magistrate approved first but suspended their order, due to their application letter did not indicate the numbers of militia members. In 1911, the Guangdong Bureau of Ordnance formulated a detailed order, which requires that in a formal application, it should include the reason of organizing armed militia, the members of the force, and the source of financial support. According to the order, "thereafter, all the militia forces in the counties had to prepare sufficient fund and recruit militia members before submitting application to the government. The gentry who are usually responsible of organizing militias should assure that the weapons would not be borrowed or transferred. The request must be sent to the county

[14] "Fanmai Qiangdan Chusi 販賣槍彈處死" (Executing the soldier who trafficked guns), *Dagong bao*, December 16, 1915.

[15] "Chaban Xiangtuan 查辦鄉團" (Inspecting militia force), *Xiangshan xunbao* 香山旬報, 63 (1910): 2.

government, which will review its militia members and other requirements. All of these details will be reviewed carefully before issuing any licenses."[16]

After the 1911 revolution, the governor-general of Manchuria issued an order to all the prefectures and counties, saying that "the central government in Beijing now ordered that the militia forces organized by gentry must be carefully inspected. The purposes of militia forces are to defend localities. However, there are some flaws in the systems. In the future, the militia forces could not purchase any types of weapons without government approval. In doing so, the rebels and bandits would not have any chance to get guns." [17]

When the central government sent this order, the Qing court was not collapse yet. However, the Qing court recognized the dangers of the existence of armed people in society. Besides the unregulated militia forces, the Qing government was worried about the social turmoil will be again destroyed its ruling foundation. The gun control was tight again to reclaim its monopoly over the violence. The tight control over arms, however, did not stop the revolutionary enterprise. In the early 1912, the Qing dynasty collapsed. In 1913, the Fengtian government was required to regulate the guns owned by the militia forces.

"As for the weapons for the militias, it has been prohibited already. However, it is heard that local government did not take it seriously. The establishment of militia and merchants' corps were sanctioned by the government. Even from the late Qing, there was no law prohibiting the organization of militias. However, these militia forces were not good in quality at all. Some

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[16] *Liangguang Guanbao*, 18 (1911): 3.

[17] "Shenzhong Junhuo 慎重軍火" (Be cautious about military weapons), *Shengjing shibao*, January 9, 1913.

disorganized militias might post threat to local order. The distribution of guns to militia had no standard regulations. Thereafter, all the provinces should set up definite law the regulating the procurement of firearms. All the procurement must be submitted to the central government for careful review."[18]

It seems that the new policy that tightened the procurement of firearms indeed made the acquisition of firearms difficult. According to an editorial that appeared in the *Shengjing Shibao* in 1913, "In Jilin province, the local paramilitary forces now needed foreign guns to defend the localities. In the previous days, they could get the weapon from the government through local council, but now they had to apply a special permit from local and above government. After approval, they would be eligible to get them."[19] In the meantime, the Fengtian government also issued an order that requiring all the local council to carefully review the request from militias. After receiving the request, local council was asked to submit the request to local government and military sections. The Fengtian governor Zhang Xiluan also ordered his subordinates to consider the militias' qualities before issuing any firearm permits. As addressed in these accounts, the government in the Manchuria recognized that militia forces had a penchant to have advanced guns from the government. However, these laws and regulations suggest the local officials were resolute to maintain their monopoly over the violence.

The early Republican government did not destroy any law established by the late Qing government, especially about the firearm control laws. The Beiyang government in 1914 enacted a law entitled "Regulations on Local Self-Defense Forces," in which it clearly stated that "all the

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[18] "Junxieju Shenzhong Junxie 軍械局慎重軍械" (The Bureau of Ordance is cautious about military weapn), *Shengjing shibao*, January 21, 1913.

[19] "Guanyu Feiqiang 關於匪槍" (On the Bandits' Guns), *Shibao*, May 9, 1916.

militia members who had guns or other firearms had to obtain the license from local government and to have their guns seared. In a situation that additional weapons are required, application must be submitted to local government in advance."[20] Such law had nothing difference with the order made by the late Qing government, as suggested in the second chapter. The state saw the militia as an extension of the state power, which was difficult to penetrate into local society.

However, the firearm control took an opposite turn a couple months later. In November 1914, the Beiyang government issued an order again to prohibit the distribution of firearms to local militia forces. According to the order, "in recent days, some reports suggest that militia members become bandits with their guns, or lend their guns to bandits. We have to stamp out this phenomenon, otherwise, the consequence would be disaster." [21]The central government then issued a letter to all the provinces, requiring that ordinary people would no longer get guns or bullets from the government." In 1917, the Beiyang government set up a guideline of organizing the merchants corps, named "The Organization Guideline of Merchants Corps," in which regulated that "the guns or other firearms owned by the merchants corps had to be distributed in terms of the number of corps members. The local government must send relevant document to the provincial government, which then signed and send it to the military bureau. The Department of Peasants and Merchants would calculate the price of the arms. The Corps had to state in details about why they required guns."[22]

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[20] Cai Hongyuan, ed., *Minguo Fagui Jicheng*, vol. 15, 34.

[21] "Dianchi Jinzhi Renmin Lingqiang 電飭禁止人民領槍" (To ban civilians from obtaining guns), *Shengjing shibao*, November 15, 1914.

[22] Cai Hongyuan, 35.

Generally speaking, the government wanted to maintain its monopoly on violence and guaranteed its authority would not be challenged by an armed populace. Thus, gun control policy was bound to be strict to maintain its monopoly. However, starting from the late Qing period, China suffered from a "state involution" process, in which the state's authority was hardly appreciated by local society.[23] In short, the state was not able to control the provinces. The provincial governors were charged with local affairs. After the fall of the Qing dynasty, political decentralization was accelerated along with the weakness of the central Beiyang government. Therefore, the orders issued by the Beiyang government could not be carried out effectively in provinces. In the meantime, local provincial governors also relied on local gentry, who were the most zealous of developing local militia forces. Therefore, the government's firearm control policy was not appreciated by provinces. The existing sources suggest that the government was more likely to encourage the gentry to develop militia forces. What they did was simply warning local gentry that the firearms should be carefully contained.

Under such situation, both local government and gentry or merchants did not take the prohibitory order seriously. For example, in November 1914, when the Fengtian government received the order, the governor issued it to local governments, ordering that "all the people and governments had to comply with the law."[24] On the other hand, however, the governor also called for the organization of militia forces, and claiming that "now the self-defense bureau is set up, thereafter, local militia forces required firearms and weapons in large amount. Otherwise, it

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[23] For the "State Involution" process, see Prasenjit Duara, *Culture, Power, and the State: Rural North China, 1900-1942*.

[24] "Tongchi Baoweituan Juling Qiangdan 通飭保衛團具領槍彈" (The order to obtain firearms and ammunitions fro the militia forces), *Shengjing shibao*, December 2, 1914.

is hard to defend localities. If militia requires bullets, such a request should be sent to government immediately to avoid banditry."[25]

In Guangdong province, the situation was rather similar. In the early 1912, the Guangdong Chamber of Commerce suggested establishing a Merchants' Corps to the provincial government. In the application, it is indicated that the Chamber of Commerce could also serve as bondsman for the procurement of weapons. Such a request was immediately approved by the Guangdong government, which was now controlled by the revolutionaries, rather than the Beiyang government in Beijing. In 1913, when Long Jiguang took over the Guangdong province, the governor also encouraged local gentry to organize militia forces. If guns were necessary, "the county magistrate must make sure the necessity and then acquired guaranty from local influential people. The request would be sent to provincial government before firearms distribution." According to these accounts, the governments in the early Republican period established relatively lax firearm control policies in comparision with the Qing. In 1924, the county magistrate of Gaoyao wrote to Sun Yat-sen, asking for five hundred rifles. Sun did not reject its request. A lot of requests like this suggest that any levels of government or individuals had no difficulties to obtain guns, once they had someone assure their guns would not be used by bandits. In the June of the same year, the Da Tangbao of Taishan County also applied to buy one hundred rifles. The local government reviewed their request carefully, and noticed that their application document did not show the quantities of existing guns. When the document was supplemented, their request was approved without any difficulty.

[25] "Qingling Tuanqiang Zhishi Xuyi Shenbao 請領團槍知事須以身保" (Endowment is required for the militia forces to obtain guns), *Huaguo bao*, December 30, 1913.

In 1924, the Guangdong arsenal set up a regulation on the distribution of guns to local militia. In this regulation, it clearly stated that:

First, for the militia forces with a desire to arm with guns, they should submit their request to county government. The arsenal would not issue their order before receiving approval from the grand marshal.

Second, as for the rifle, the price would be 160 yuan. The maximum amount of bullets for each militia is 200. Each bullet worth 20 yuan.

Third, if militia has special requirement on the design of the weapon, a letter of endorsement is required from the government. In the first month, twenty percent of weapons would be distributed. The rest would be distributed within three months.

Forth, all of the rifles would be sealed with using guidelines. These guns would be registered by provincial government. They are awaiting future inspection.

Fifth, the local government had the responsibility to inspect the weapons owned by local militias. When receiving weapons, militia leaders should report their weapons with detailed information to local government without any delay.[26]

According to the regulation established in 1924, it is evident that it aimed to regulate the weapon use by the militia forces, and in the meantime, it also encouraged the organization of armed militias. In October of 1924, the military commander of Guangdong, Xu Chongzhi, also wanted to simplified the procedure of obtaining guns by militia forces. He ordered that "at this moment, the militia leader could apply their request to the military government directly, and do not have to submit their request to arsenals."[27]

Though both the late Qing and early Republican governments allowed the common people to own guns for self-defense. Most guns were held, however, by the militia forces.

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[26] "Binggongchang Xinding Mintuan Lingqiang Zhangcheng 兵工廠新定民團領槍章程," *Qishi er shanghangbao* 七十二商行報, April 11, 1924.

[27] "Mintuan yu Siren Lingqiang Shouxu 民團與私人領槍手續" (The procure to obtain guns for militia forces and civilians), *Guagnzhou minguo ribao*, October 4, 1934.

Therefore, the government noticed that to regulate civilian weapons, the regulation of militia weapons was inevitable.

For example, Sichuan province in 1908 issued a statute regulating the militia weapons. In it, it stated that "as for the militia forces scattered in localities, the foreign guns should be inspected by local government. These guns must be sealed and registered with local government… The provincial government should inspect these guns at least once per quarter. If the gun was lost or lent out to others, the militia leaders must be punished heavily." In the meantime, Sichuan government also regulated that "other than weapons owned by militias, those guns owned by ordinary people without government sanction should be confiscated. These gun owners could be compensated. Those who refused to turn their guns in would be published."[28]

The regulation upon the militia weapons was in place during the late Qing period. In 1901, the Guangdong Bureau of Military Logistics established a more detailed regulation over the militias and their weapons.

"After the militia purchased weapons, its leader had to report to the local government. The militia also needs to report if they had used the guns against bandits. If any guns were lost, they had to report immediately to the government.

Local government is required to inspect the militia weapons regularly. If they fail to fulfill their duties, they would be punished. If the guns or bullets got lost, the militia leaders would be punished. If some militia members transfer the weapon to bandits, they would be arrested immediately.

The distribution of guns is based on how many militia members. If some members leave the militia, their guns must be turned in immediately. If the militia forces dismissed, all of their weapons must be collected by local government without delay.

The information on the quantities of guns and their maintaining records, along with the registration records would be open to the public."[29]

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[28] "Jin Mintuan Sishou Qiangdan 禁民團私售槍彈" (To ban militia forces from selling firearms and ammunitions), *Shenbao*, July 12, 1908.

[29] *Liangguang Guanbao*, 18 (1911): 3.

In 1909, the Bureau once again revised the statute, and emphasized that "thereafter, local gentry should report the use of weapons by militia forces to the provincial government every year. If the guns were used to stamp out bandits, a letter is required. Different levels of governments should inspect the guns owned by militia forces."[30]

According to the statute, the Guangdong government of the late Qing granted the power to regulate militia forces to the local government. The organization of militia forces had to be approved in advance by local government. Then, the local government had absolute power to regulate and control the militia weapons. The officials in local government were also required to inspect the militia force on a routine basis. There are many similar regulation across the country. These regulations require the officials to oversee the ownership of weapons by militia. As we know, the routine inspection is a duty for the local officials, who in reality, on rare occasion inspected the militia guns.

After the Republic of China was established, almost all the provincial governments set up policies toward the weapons owned by militia forces. In 1921, Jiangsu Province promulgated the law on regulating militia and civilian weapons. It clearly stated that "all of the weapons owned by militias, no matter whether they were used or not, had to be registered with the local government. The registration included the types of guns, quantities, seal numbers, and other information. The inspection of firearms had three steps. First, the gun should be sealed with unique number. Second, the information must be registered. Third, a license will be issued."[31]

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[30] Ibid.

[31] Xu Xunru 許恂儒, *Xianzheng Quanshu* 縣政全書 N.P., 1925, 61.

These regulations and laws were collected in the *Xianzheng Quanshu* in 1925, which was used during the Republican period as a guideline to manage local affair for local magistrate. The *Xianzheng Quanshu* also served as guideline about how the regulate or control civilian gun ownership. According to the Xianzheng Quanshu, "all of private armies with defense purposes should be purchased through county magistrate. The guns must be sealed and then distributed to local people. The guns must be registered with local government and disclose their usage monthly."[32]

The similar regulation also appeared in Guangdong. In 1913, the Guangdong government enacted "Regulations on the Militia Forces," in which it clearly stated that all counties if bought guns from other channels, rather than the government, militia leaders have to report to county government immediately. The county government had the duties to collect these guns and seal them before they could be used by militia members."[33]

A glance at the gun regulations established during the early Republican period reveals that the policies were embodied in two aspects. First, all the government emphasized the importance of engraving of guns to assure these guns were used legally. Second, inspection is also required by law to assure that the guns were kept by local militia forces, rather than other outlaws.

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[32] Ibid., 62.

[33] "Guangdong Chouban Baojia Tuanlian Zanxing Zhangcheng 廣東籌辦保甲團練暫行章程" (The Provisional Act of the Militia Forces in Guangdong), *Huaguo bao* 華國報, November 24, 1913.

Gun Licensing and Registration

The late Qing's attempts to mobilize armed people to regain control over society backfired when popular armed forces undermined the state's monopoly on violence. But a variety of gun regulation measures targeting at armed individuals including registration, periodical inspection, and licensing originated during the late Qing formed an important legacy to the Republican period. Though the rise of provincialism after the founding of the Republic troubling the implementation of a uniform gun control law, most provinces, acting in concert with the central government, all adopted independent policies regarding private gun ownership. These gun regulation policies, despite the local variations, appeared to follow a similar logic and purpose. The major goal of regulating gun owners was to put guns in the hands of those people who would not use their weapons to commit illegal acts.

To purchase a gun, the law-abiding civilians had to meet specific requirement designed by either central or local governments. The common procedure is to get a purchasing permit from local government in advance, providing proof of their status as "good civilians." What was the status to be a "good civilian?" In the spring of 1922, the Ministry of War of the Beiyang government telegraphed to the Fengtian Province, specifying the qualification of the purchaser. According to this decree, any people living in the rural regions had to meet the minimum property requirement. In Fengtian for instance, a good civilian was obliged to provide information about the arable land (at least 750 acres) and housing (at least 20 rooms). If the family did not meet the requirement, he might not occupy certain official rankings.[34]

[34] "Qudi Qiangxie zhi Tongling 取締槍械之通令" (The order to stamp out guns), *Shengjing shibao,* February 18, 1922.

In the December of 1926, the Nationalist Revolutionary Army enacted the first nationwide gun control law "The Statute on the People's Self-Defense Guns" in which Chiang Kai-shek's military government ordered all the weapons owned by either ordinary individuals or militia forces had to be reported to his government. The purpose of establishing the policy was to have the compliance of the gun owners. However, if we look at the policy closely, the policy placed too many requirements on the local gentry and militia leaders. It was difficult to make all these strongmen follow the government order as expected. In a period that the state had no direct control over the local society, the firearm control was hardly effective. In 1925, the Canton Municipal Police admitted that "the government only issues gun licenses and engraves their guns. It never addressed the issue of illegal ownership of guns, which caused more serious problems."[35]

The governments in Manchuria had similar regulations as Guangdong. In 1912, the governor-general of Guangdong Zhao Erxun ordered all the counties to report the guns owned by local militia forces. He also ordered the foreign firearm merchants to stop selling any types of weapons to people without government licenses.[36] Based on the newspaper accounts, Zhao's order was quickly carried out by local counties. County magistrates sent working reports to Zhao, reporting the policy has been implemented. The Liaoyang County reported that "the magistrate dispatched police to investigate the use of firearms among militias and then seals their

[35] Xu Xunru, *Xianzheng Quanshu*, 61.

[36] "Huanqu Ziwei Qiangzhi zhi Bugao 換取自衛槍支之佈告" (The announcement to obtain gun license), Guangzhou *minguo ribao*, June 15, 1925.

weapons." In 1922, Jilin province enacted similar regulations, which required all the weapons owned by police forces, militias, and ordinary individuals to be registered. [37]

The regulation of guns owned by ordinary individuals had three aspects. First, the government set up the qualification of individuals who could buy guns. In 1915, for example, Fengtian government carried out a policy that designed the qualification of armed people. "The Manchuria was famous for its frequent banditry. Many ordinary peasants purchased guns for self-defense. This has been sanctioned by government. In recent days, local government reported many cases of robbery and banditry. These robbers and bandits all were equipped with guns. It is possible that the peasants who had guns in home are likely to assist bandits and outlaws. If one gun was lost among ordinary people, then a bandit would get one gun. If so, the consequence would be disastrous. The self-defense power was not strong among the people, police force and militias, and collective defense forces are necessary. In the meantime, the guns owned by ordinary people should be closely monitored."[38]

If we read this letter closely, it is evident that the Fengtian government took the private gun ownership for granted. The government noticed that it was legal to own guns by ordinary people, but was also worried about the regulation of these scattered guns. In this statement, the government merely ordered local government officials to deal with the issues, but failed to point out the content at all.

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[37] "Qudi Qiangzhi zhi Tongling 取締槍支之通令" (The order to stamp out civilians' guns), *Shengjing Shibao*, February 18, 1922.

[38] "Tongchi Tuochou Baocun Minjian Qiangxie zhi Banfa 通飭妥籌保存民間槍械之辦法" (The methods to maintain civilians' guns), *Shengjing shibao*, January 28, 1915.

In 1917, Fengtian government went further to regulate the qualifications of individuals who were eligible to purchase guns. "In recent days, the bandits disturbed localities with guns. It seemed that they had powerful foreign guns and countless bullets. It could be speculated that these bandits got these weapons from ordinary armed civilians, because it was hardly possible for these bandits to buy guns without government approval. In order to stamp out bandits, it is necessary to regulate the civilian weapons. Thereafter, only rich families whose properties worth more than three thousand dollars were eligible to purchase guns. Even if the families were rich, they did not hair brave men, these families were not eligible to purchase guns."[39]

In 1921, Jilin province enacted a new law about the private gun ownership, because the 1917 regulation was "hardly implemented." The new gun control law changed the requirement of property. "All the merchants and people have to meet the following requirement to get the license to purchase a gun. The merchants should own more than two thousand yuan, or owned more than 10 mu land and 5 rooms, or rent land for more than 20 mu. The merchants also require some others who could write warranty for them. The guns must also obtain license from local government and got registered. If any guns or weapons lost, the owners have to report to local government immediately. After the privately-owned guns get registered, the owners should have their weapons inspected twice per year by local government."[40]

The regulation in reality set a precondition for the gun purchase. According to the law, only wealthy families, including merchants, landlords, and other businessmen could get guns

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[39] "Jinmin Maiqiang zhi Bugao 禁民買槍之佈告" (The announcement to ban people from purchasing guns), *Shengjing shibao*, September 13, 1917.

[40] "Qudi Siyou Qiangzhi Banfa 取締私有槍支辦法" (The initiatives to ban privately-owned guns), *Shengjing shibao*, November 12, 1921.

lawfully. However, the policy was difficult to implement. First, even if the eligible merchants, they had to purchase their guns from government, which was much expensive than other channels. Second, to get the license, they had to find some other people to serve as their guarantors, which was hard. In the meantime, some poor families for the sake of self-defense also obtained their weapons from smugglers or in black market, which was invisible to the government. In practice, the law enacted by the Jilin and Fengtian provinces were fruitless.

There are also other provinces establishing similar requirements for the purchase of guns. In 1920, Jiangsu provinces enacted similar regulations. "One civilians who satisfy the following requirements are eligible to own guns. First, any corporations or organizations registered with local government. Second, civilians with formal occupation. Third, wealthy merchants."[41] The law also regulated the quantities of guns ought to be owned by each household. Each household only could get five guns maximum. All the weapons had to be reported to government.

Some counties in particular encouraged eligible merchants or gentry to purchase guns. For example, the Yi County of Fengtian province encouraged the wealthy gentry to purchase guns for the purpose of collective defense. Though these guns would be prepared by these individuals, as suggested by the council meeting, they could be organized by local county to organize militia forces. To deal with the loss of privately-owned guns, some counties also helped maintain these guns. In one county of Fengtian, "the police department noticed the frequent loss of civilian guns, which channeled the banditry. The government encouraged these armed civilians sold their guns to the Police Department, or turned their guns in with compensation. In the season when banditry was frequent, these guns would be mobilized to form collective

[41] Xu Xunru, *Xianzheng Quanshu*, 60.

defense forces."[42] Existing sources do not disclose the implementation of this policy. It is likely that setting up the qualification of armed civilians did not prevent illegal civilian ownership.

Another policy that was used to regulate civilian weapons was gun registration. From the Qing dynasty to the Republican period, sealing on the guns and then registering with local government became the common way to keep civilian weapons under control. In 1914, Canton Municipal Government carried out a policy requiring "all the officials who conducted survey in local counties had to investigate the circulation of civilian weapons, and have these weapons sealed." "After the guns were sealed, local government should inspect their registration immediately."[43] Each gun was assigned a specific number for tracking its usage. During the whole Republican period, the government used three steps to have civilian guns under surveillience: sealing, numbering, and registration. The well-known *Shengjing Shibao* 盛京时报 reported largely about the registration of civilian weapons.

The gun licence was issued to the civilian gun owners who were sanctioned by local government to bear their weapons. The policy was not carried out until the early 1900s, and then continued to be implemented during the Republican period. In 1913, after the failure of the Second Revolution, politics in Guagndong once again became quite complex because Chen Jiongming and Sun Yat-sen were pushed out of power by the Guangxi Clique army, which was allied with President Yuan Shikai, who was engaged in a political and military battle with Sun over the nature of the Republican regime in Beijing. In 1913, Long Jiguang, who was warlord of

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[42] "Qudi Minyou Qiangxiean 取締民有槍械案" (The order to ban civilian gun ownership), *Shengjing shibao*, September 10, 1913.

[43] "Diaocha Qiangxie 調查槍械" (Investigating Civilians' guns), *Guangzhou minguo ribao*, July 15, 1914.

the Guangxi Clique ruled most of Guangdong on behalf of Yuan Shikai until late 1917. When Long arrived in Guangdong, he carried out a massive campaign to stamp out Sun Yat-sen's remnants. Fearing the armed civilians posting threat against his military government, Long reclaimed that "if anyone concealed the gun without obtaining licenses from government, they should be punished."[44] It is hard to measure how the policy was implemented. The control of gun in the chaotic period was extremely important to maintain the warlords' prominent status.

Some counties in Guangdong also enacted specific regulations towards private gun ownership. In 1922, the Taishan County of Guangdong established a law, requiring "(1) All the armed individuals or groups, if not those police or soldiers, must obtain gun license; (2) To apply the license, one should submit their application in person in local police department. (3) The application should clearly identify the name, occupation, detailed description of guns, the quantities of bullets, and other necessary information. (4) The armed individuals are required to obtain a letter of endorsement from local gentry, who assure their guns are used for self-defense purpose only."[45] The new law also listed the price for licenses. It should be noted that the government made differences among the types of guns. For the advanced Mauser, Colt, and other foreign guns, the price is five yuan, while the outmoded guns deserved much less price for the license. Certainly, the government also required local police to keep close eyes to these licensed guns to avoid any lost.

Long Jiguang's Guangxi Clique did not rule long in Guangdong. In late 1917, his troops were again defeated by Sun yat-sen and his ally Chen Jiongming, who then established a

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[44] "Shenzhong Qiangxie 慎重槍械" (Be cautious about guns), *Shengjing shibao*, March 4, 1917.

[45] "Bugao Qiangzhi Lingzhao Zhangcheng 佈告槍支領照章程" (Anouncement on the gun licensing), *Huaguo bao* 華國報, January 15, 1922.

claiming to be the legitimate Republican government. The alliance between Sun and Chen Jiongming ended in 1922. After a military conflict between Sun and Chen, Chen was chased from Guagndong and fled to the eastern part of the province and was finally defeated in 1925. Thereafter, Sun used Guangdong as his headquarter of his North Expedition. In 1923, Sun Yat-sen enacted a statute entitled 'The Regulation on Civilian Weapons," in which it identified the qualification of armed civilians and the procedure of license application. "The gun license is required for civilian gun holders in urban area. One must submit their name, home address, occupation, and other information on the guns to the government. A letter of endorsement by wealthy merchant is still required. As for the rural area, government recognizes the letter of endorsement from merchant is difficult to obtain. The letter could be sent from local gentry or other prominent individual in village."[46] All the licenses would be issued by Sun Yat-sen's Republican government only.

The mechanism of gun licensing changed from the late Qing to Republican period. The early Republican government required every single gun should be licensed, rather than one license for all, as late Qing government did. So called "one gun, one license," the new policy aimed to make a difference between "legal" and "illegal" guns. When the police inspected guns, the license became the sole standard. The law also required that the license is required to transfer the ownership of guns. The mechanism indicated that the government acknowledged the popularity of guns in society, and also made the ownership of guns legal. When Chiang Kai-shek

[46] "Dabenying Junzhengbu Hefa Renmin Qiangzhi Zhizhao Jianzhang 大本營軍政部核發人民槍支執照簡章" (Regulations on gun registration to armed civilians), in *Minguo Fagui Jicheng* 民國法規集成, ed. Cai Hongyuan, vol 3 (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 1999), 240-41. "Guangzhi Qiangxie," *Shenbao*, December 12, 1923.

unified China in 1928, the issuance of gun licenses turned out to be the typical way to manage civilian weapons.

It should be noted that the early Republican government only required armed individuals to apply for gun licenses. Militia forces and merchants Corps, as discussed in the previous chapters, would not need licenses for every single weapon. As mentioned in the second chapter, one channel of the circulation of guns during the Republican period was the transference from the sanctioned militias to outlaws or other demanded individuals. Therefore, the policy which aimed exclusively at the individual guns also generated some social programs. It failed to resolve the problem that some militia member might sell their weapons to bandits or other outlaws. The government was not unaware of this social problem. In 1925, Guangdong government issued the amendment to the "Statute of Civilians Weapons."

First, the statute aims at stamping out illegal civilian weapons to maintain social order."

Second, the Ministry of Military of the Guangdong Government is responsible for regulating civilian weapons.

Third, the Bureau of Police was the sole government organ to issue gun license in Guangdong. Local bureau of police should collect the materials from armed individuals and submitted them to the Ministry of Military, which will review their qualifications.

Fourth, each single gun should have one license. For the cannon, the same policy applies.

Fifth, applicants should also pay the license fee.

Sixth, all the guns and other firearms, no matter they owned by individuals or by collective forces, should have licenses with them. Otherwise, the owner would be punished. The gun licensing policy also applies to the one who worked in government or military, but owned guns for individual use.[47]

The new policy clearly states that all the guns and cannons should be entitled to obtain licenses. Cannons were not typical weapons for individuals with defensive purposes. Only

[47] "Huangqu Renmin Ziwei Qiangzhi Zhizhao zhi Bugao 換取人民自衛槍支執照之佈告" (Announcement on the gun licensing), *Guangzhou minguo ribao*, August 15, 1925.

militias, some villages, and commercial ship owned cannons for collective defense, while the guns were owned mostly by ordinary individuals. The new law also required that individuals who worked in government and military registered their personal weapons with local government. Letters of endorsement were required to get the gun licenses. The new policy indicated that the previous gun sealing practice gradually gave way to the gun licenses. The gun sealing proved ineffective to keep gun owners lawful. The guns with seals would be transferred or stolen. Local police could not make sure the holders of sealed guns were its lawful owners.

Nevertheless, the gun licensing policy also encountered many challenges when it was carried out in local society. The Sanshui County of Guangdong province, for example, wrote to Guangdong government in 1926, complaining that "after the new law was enacted, no one applied gun license in local government."[48] The County magistrate explained that "the new statute states that letter of endorsement from wealthy merchants or wealthy gentry are necessary to get a license. However, in some remote areas, there are few business exiting and armed civilians could not find one to write the letter. In the meantime, guns as tools for defense, had potential to kill others. Even if there were merchants and gentry in local village, few of them ran risk to write the letter."[49]

After Guangdong government received the complaint, the Military Council made slight change on the law, and claimed that "As for the people living in remote region, if there is no wealthy merchant, every five armed individuals could organize as an entity to write the letter of endorsement on a mutual basis. The county magistrate should also sign on the letter to prove it is

[48] Guangdong Provincial Archives, JL500-234-5487.

[49] Ibid.

appropriate."[50] It is clear that even if the law aiming at regulate civilian weapons and maintaining local order was enacted, the effectiveness of its implementation was highly doubtful. Given that many guns circulated in local society are those without gun licenses, people would not like to apply the licenses. In 1924, a newspaper editorial stated that people had a couple reasons that made them reluctant to apply the licenses. "First, it is difficult to get the letter of endorsement from either wealthy gentry, merchants, or their fellow gun owners. Second, to apply a license, they had to pay certain amount of money, which brings financial burden to peasants."[51]

Besides the Guangdong province, the provinces in Manchuria also adopted a gun license policy. In the years of the early Republican period, the Fengtian government ordered that all the merchants and ordinary civilians apply for gun licenses and have their weapons registered with local government. Heilongjiang province also made more explicit regulation which were then distributed to local county governments in 1912. However, the provincial government discovered one year later that local county governments did not report how the policy was implemented. In 1914, the provincial government in Harbin made another announcement, requiring them to "make sure all the civilian weapons, no matter newly purchased ones or outmoded. are carefully inspected by local county governments, which maintained the records and submit to provincial government." In 1916, the Department of Police of Jilin Province sent an order to all the policemen in province. "Thereafter, all the policemen should inform the armed residents in their jurisdiction that all the weapons could not be lent out or transferred without government approval. Once an unlicensed gun is discovered, its owner had to have their guns sealed

[50] "Diaocha Qiangzhi 調查槍支" (Investigaing Civilians' guns), *Guangzhou minguo ribao*, August 15, 1925.

[51] "Yanjin Sijie Qiangpiao 嚴禁私借槍票" (To ban the transfer of gun liences), *Shengjing shibao*, November 8, 1914.

immediately. Otherwise the owner would be punished, and his weapon will be confiscated." Based on these order issued from provincial government, it is safe to make a judgment that the gun control policy was not carried out effectively. Unlike Guangdong, where the policy of gun licensing was implemented as early as 1910s, many regions like Manchuria did not adopt such policy.

The policy of gun licenses was adopted nationwide starting from 1920s. The legal documents of the provinces in Manchuria in the early 1920s clearly exhibited the policy transition. In the early 1923, Jilin Province issued an order to local county governments again, stating that "the issue of gun was extremely important to the national security and social stability. For those merchants and ordinary civilians who plan to purchase guns for self-defense should apply gun licenses to local government." [52]From this statement, it can be speculated that in the early 1920s, the policy of gun sealing was replaced by gun licensing. After receiving the order, the Chamber of Commerce in Jilin Province forwarded this order to the Jilin merchants. The Chamber also provided convenient channel for merchants, who could send their application to the Chamber. The Chamber then collected all the documents, which would be reviewed by the provincial government. In the April of 1923, the Fengtian Police Department also issued a similar order like Jilin. Like Guangdong province, the provinces in Manchuria also realized that it was hard for ordinary peasants to get a letter of endorsement from local wealthy merchants and prominent gentry. Therefore, both Jilin and Fengtian provinces made an amendment, claiming that the gun owners could write the letter mutually.

[52] "Ziweiqiang Yixu Lingzhao 自衛槍亦須領照" (License is required for self-defense guns), *Shengjing shibao*, January 16, 1924.

Even though government of different levels issued gun control policies, namely the mechanism of gun licensing, the effectiveness of its implementation was highly doubtful. As suggested in many newspaper accounts, many peasants did not register their guns as required by local government. For example, in 1924, a military commander in Jilin admitted that "many merchants and other civilians prepared guns for self-defense, most of whom did not have their gun registered and did not obtain gun licenses. The local police set up some checkpoint in important regions to inspect if passing people have unregistered guns with them. Some gun owners counterfeited the gun licenses. Some bandits even shot policemen when encountering inspection."[53] The military commander once again reiterated that gun licensing was mandatory. For those armed people without licenses, the punishment was severe. Many accounts like this indicate that the prevalence of unlicensed guns also became a social problem, even if the policy was promulgated for years in Manchuria.

Conclusion

In March 1938, Chen Cheng, a senior general in the Nationalist Chinese military wrote to Chiang Kai-shek, expressing his deep concern over the popular movements in southwestern Shandong province. The confiscation of civilian-owned guns in Shandong, Chen argued, did more to provoke peasants' anti-government outrage than any socio-economic cause. Chen attributed the peasant unrest to the policy of confiscating guns adopted by Han Fuju, the military governor of Shandong, who had been executed two months previously for disobeying central government orders. Starting in the early1930s, Han took the advice of Liang Shuming (梁漱溟

[53] "Hufei Qiangsha Xunjing 胡匪槍殺巡警" (Bandits killed police with his gun), *Shengtian Shibao,* May 15, 1925.

1893-1988), a leading figure of the rural reconstruction movement, to collect private guns, which were then distributed to militia for collective defense.[54] However, local residents were skeptical about the policy, fearing that they would lose their means of self-defense. To avoid escalating tension, Chiang quickly ordered Shandong authorities to return the guns and required them not to register any private weapons.[55]

In was shown in the 1938 case that the gun policy that local government adopted was not consistent as expected. This chapter focuses more on the regulation policies from both national and provincial governments, which was not effectively implicated. The Nationalist government realized that civilian possession of guns subverted their authority over local areas, and enacted various mechanisms to regulate the private gun ownership and its circulation. The purpose was to put the gun in the hands of "good people" who were expected to protect themselves and defend their localities. Nevertheless, these central gun regulation efforts failed when regional power blocs undercut the central government's power. Though both provincial and central governments adopted similar strategies to regulate armed people, a standard and unified policy was absent. As discussed in the beginning, in wartime, the government changed its policy for fear that restrictive control might provoke illegal gun owners to insurrection. This lax and inconsistent gun regulation policy, however, gave the Chinese Communist Party the opportunity to take advantage of these armed masses, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

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[54] For Liang Shuming's rural reconstruction movement, see Guy Alitto, *The Last Confucian: Liang Shuming and the Chinese Dilemma of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

[55] Chen Cheng, *Chen Cheng Xiansheng Shuxinji: yu Jiang Zhongzheng Xiansheng Wanglai Handian* 陳誠先生書信集:與蔣中正先生往來函電 (Letters of Chen Cheng to Chiang Kai-shek), vol. 1 (Taipei: Academia Historica, 2007), 302.

~ CHAPTER FIVE ~

"Political Power Grows out of the Barrel of a Gun":

The Mobilization of Armed Masses in the Communist Revolution

Introduction

In summer 1939 most Western countries were still at peace, while the flames of war had already raged in China for years. Two years before, the Marco Polo Bridge Incident sparked the eight-year long Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), which inflamed Chinese nationalism against foreign aggression. After the Xi'an Incident of 1936 the Nationalists and Communist parties had put aside their domestic hostilities in a joint effort to stave off Japan. Known as the Second United Front, the alliance did not last long because both parties still competed for strategic advantage in "free China."[1] The alliance was in name only. Although the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) agreed to place its armies under Nationalist command, it never ceased to expand its independent military power in the provinces of North China.

The CCP's acts of noncompliance and other unsanctioned activities were frequently reported to Chiang Kai-shek, the generalissimo of the Nationalist Army. In 1939 Liao Lei (廖磊 1891-1939), the provincial governor of Anhui Province, wrote to Chiang, bitterly criticizing Communist general Peng Xuesong (彭雪楓 1907-1944) who, along with his army, confiscated people's guns in the Jiangsu-Anhui border region.[2] Peng's cruel and surreptitious action, as

[1] During the Second Sino-Japanese War the term "free China" referred to the regions of China not under the control of the Imperial Japanese Army or any of its puppet states. For a general introduction of the term, see Rana Mitter, *Forgotten Ally: China's World War II, 1937-1945* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013), 175.

[2] Academia Historica, 002-090300-00018-082, (May 25, 1939).

reported in Liao's letter, was apparently in violation of Chiang's command, who had repeatedly ordered local armies to not seize people's armsregistered or not--during the war. Chiang was well aware of the CCP's steady efforts to strengthen its military capabilities in the rural areas. His attempts to centralize military and political authority seemed futile. He merely ordered Peng's commanding officer Ye Ting (葉挺 1896-1946), the army commander of the New Fourth Army, to admonish Peng.[3] However, Chiang himself was clearly aware that his Nationalist government, now based in the southwest city of Chongqing, barely held direct control over the north, especially the rural areas where the CCP had been building its political legitimacy for years. Neither Nationalist nor Communist sources tell us whether Peng Xuefeng and his army were subject to any disciplinary punishment. Liao Lei also referred this issue to Zhang Yunyi (張雲逸 1892-1974), the chief of staff of the New Fourth Army, expecting the Communists to respect the central command and not confiscate civilian weapons. However, Zhang deliberately ignored the request and ordered his subordinates to focus their attention on strengthening the army's independent military presence.[4]

The dispute between Liao and the Communists in Anhui Province was not an isolated episode. Military reports that condemned the CCP's confiscation of people's guns or mobilizing armed peasants to expand its own military power were consistently reported to the central government in Chongqing.[5] However, Chongqing's efforts to command the Communist-led

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[3] Academia Historica, 002-090300-00205-210, (June 20, 1939).

[4] Luo Yingping 羅永平 and Ceng Fuxian 曾傅先, *Zhang Yunyi Dajiang* 張雲逸大將 (General Zhang Yunyi) (Zhengzhou: Haiyan chubanshe, 1995), 143-44.

[5] Reports from provincial governors and military commanders about the CCP's gun confiscation activities were sent to the central government in Chongqing. These documents are preserved at the Academia Historia under the category "Zhongzhong bufa zuixing 種種不法罪行" (Several sorts of misdeeds).

armies seemed futile. Moreover, Chiang failed to predict the Communists' effective efforts in utilizing the armed populace in their revolutionary agenda. Scattered as they were, these military reports to Chiang Kai-shek indicated some new elements of the CCP's activities in wartime China. In these reports the CCP was accused of confiscating people's guns for its own military use. Nevertheless, what Chiang had been told about the CCP's activities was incomplete. Gun confiscation was one of many policies that the Communists had adopted to cope with the armed populace in local society. Even Peng Xuefeng, who was blamed in these military reports for taking away the peasants' guns, actively mobilized armed peasants and organized them into local militia forces, which was a distinctly different way of dealing with civilians' guns.[6] The strategic importance of an armed populace, and how the Communists utilized them in many instances but confiscated their weapons in other instances thus deserves further scholarly attention.

In the late 1930s the Communists, who had just survived the epical Long March, were dedicated to building and consolidating the base areas. When the CCP enlarged its military and political influence in North China and established its grip in the provinces, including Shanxi, Gansu, Ningxia, Henan, Hebei, and Shandong, they encountered an already-militarized local

[6] Peng Xuefeng, who organized guerrilla warfare in Henan, Anhui, and Jiangsu revolutionary bases, believed that conducting guerrilla warfare was impossible without broad mass support. According to Peng, the Communists should mobilize people to join local militias that would coordinate the fight with Japan. See Peng Xuefeng, "Yuoji Zhanshu de Jige Jiban Zuozhan Yanze 遊擊戰術的幾個基本原則" (Some basic fighting principles in guerrilla tactics), in *Kangzhan shiqi de Zhugou* 抗戰時期的竹溝 (Zhugou during the Second Sino-Japanese War), ed. Zhonggong Zhumadian diwei dangshi ziliao zhengbian weiyuanhui 中共駐馬店地委黨史資料整編委員會 (Compilation Committee for Historical Materials of the Zhumadian CCP) (Zhengzhou: Henan renmin chubanshe, 1985), 33-53.

society that led to the proliferation of guns among the masses.[7] Some wealthy landlords not only armed themselves with rifles but also organized community armed forces to protect their family and property. Ordinary peasants also sought to protect themselves against bandits with guns. The existence of an armed populace in North China offered the Communists the opportunity to bring armed civilians into and advance the Communist cause. For instance, in 1940 Mao Zedong was concerned with developing armed forces in Shandong Province. In his telegraph to the 115th Divisions of the Eighth Route Army, whose troops were already stationed in the province, Mao stated that he was pleased that the "civilians' guns" were sufficient to support the development of the Communist force.[8] For the CCP leaders, effective control of an armed peasantry was a prerequisite to strengthening the Communist military force and to consolidate its power in local society.

The party endeavored to launch massive programs to mobilize the masses for their Communist revolution, an effort that has been the subject of numerous studies. Many research works have centered on questions such as what factors made Chinese peasants revolutionary and how the CCP won mass support. For instance, Mark Seldon's seminal studies of Communist activities in Shaanxi and Steven Levine's analysis of revolution in Manchuria demonstrate,

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[7] During the period from 1937 to 1945 the CCP established five major base areas: the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border Region, the Shanxi-Chahar-Hebei Border Region, the Shanxi-Hebei-Shandong-Henan Border Region, the Shanxi-Suiyuan Border Region, and the Shandong Base Area. For a general introduction of each border region see Feng Chongyi and David S. G. Goodman, "Introduction: Explaining Revolution," in *North China at War: The Social Ecology of Revolution, 1937-1945*, eds. Feng Chongyi and David S. G. Goodman (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999), 1-24.

[8] Zhongguo Renmin Jiefangjun Junshi Kexueyuan 中國人民解放軍軍事科學院, ed. *Mao Zedong Junshi Wenxuan* 毛澤東軍事文選 (Selected military papers of Mao Zedong) (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun zhanshi chubanshe, 1981), 225.

though in different ways, that the CCP deployed its strength in organizational and mobilization skills through either social revolution or political action.[9] The CCP's efforts to form tactical coalitions with armed groups or secret societies, such as the Red Spears, have also been deeply analyzed.[10] However, previous studies of the CCP's mobilization efforts have rarely taken the party's gun policies seriously because historians assume that armed people automatically belonged to either militia forces, bandit groups, or other armed local groups. These studies place the complicated nexus bewteen the Communists and armed groups at the center of their inquiry, but overlook those armed individuals who had no affiliations to any groups. Thus the study of how the CCP co-opted militia forces, local militarists, or bandit groups is not sufficient to draw a complete picture of the party's policies for coping with an armed populace. Many ordinary Chinese men and women of different class backgrounds owned guns, and the party sought ways to accept that reality and turned it to its advantage.

The important role of privately owned weapons in the party's revolutionary cause has not been taken into account. Building on the existing scholarship on the CCP's revolutionary enterprise in the 1930s and 1940s, my research goes further, exploring how the CCP dealt with armed individuals in a fragmented and militarized society. This chapter makes three arguments. First, the CCP made the mobilization of an armed populace part of its mass line policy to fulfill its revolutionary agenda. Second, the implementation of the CCP's gun policies at the local level

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[9] See Mark Selden, *The Yenan Way in Revolutionary China*; Steven Levine, *Anvil of Victory: The Communist Revolution in Manchuria, 1945-1948* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

[10] Elizabeth Perry argues that the CCP's policies toward local armed groups were contingent. The CCP first formed alliances with local groups. Once the Communists gained the upper hand, they moved from a policy of rapprochement to confrontation. See Elizabeth Perry, *Rebels and Revolutionaries in North China, 1845-1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980), 208-47.

was tied to its overall mobilization tactics, adopting varied stances toward gun owners in term of their class division and social status. The CCP's clear distinction between what historian Odoric Y.K. Wou defines as core and peripheral groups in mobilizing the masses loomed large in its gun policies.[11] Finally, the CCP's gun policies were designed only in part to arm the masses, as they did routinely by recruiting peasants into the army or Communist-affiliated militia forces. Rather, they were about dealing with a preexisting pattern of personal gun ownership. Their practice aimed to bring these previously armed civilians into the revolutionary cause. Based mostly on party archive documents and local historical materials, this chapter first attempts to answer the question of why the mobilization of armed civilians was inevitable in the CCP's revolutionary cause. It then follows the strategies and tectics that the CCP adopted in mobilizing an armed populace in North China.

Overview of the Communist Mobilization in North China

> Our central task at present is to mobilize the broad masses to take part in the revolutionary war, overthrow imperialism and the Kuomintang by means of such war, spread the revolution throughout the country, and drive imperialism out of China. Anyone who does not attach enough importance to this central task is not a good revolutionary cadre. If our comrades really comprehend this task and understand that the revolution must at all costs be spread throughout the country, then they should in no way neglect or underestimate the question of the immediate interests, the well-being, of the broad masses. For the revolutionary war is a war of the masses; it can be waged only by mobilizing the masses and relying on them. (Mao Zedong, "Be Concerned with the Well-being of the Masses, Pay Attention to Methods of Work," 1934) [12]

[11] Odoric Y.K. Wou, *Mobilizing the Masses: Building Revolution in Henan*, 18.

[12] Mao Zedong, "Be Concerned with the Well-being of the Masses, Pay Attention to Methods of Work," *Selected Work of Mao Tse-Tung*, Vol. 1 (Elmsford: Pergamon Press, 1965), 147.

When Mao Zedong gave this famous address in January 1934 in which he called for the mobilization of the masses against imperialism and its domestic rival, the Chinese Communist Party was about to be wiped out in the Jiangxi Soviet Base by Chiang Kai-shek's Fifth Encirclement and Annihilation Campaign. A few months later the Communists were compelled to abandon Jiangxi Soviet, and then embarked on the legendary Long March to Northwest China, where the Communist Revolution ensured its survival.[13] The outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War and the Xi'an Incident of 1936 saved the Communists from being eradicated and offered them a breathing spell to expand. Under the leadership of Mao Zedong, the party, now headquartered in Yenan 延安, stretched its political influence across North China and some base areas in the southern provinces. When the Japanese surrendered in 1945 the CCP became a considerable military and political power that could not be underestimated by the Nationalist government. It was already in a position to fight Chiang Kai-shek's armies in the civil war that ensued.[14]

One of the contributing explanations for the CCP's stunning victory lies in its effective mobilization of the masses during the Second Sino-Japanese War. Mao Zedong's address in 1934 calling for the mobilization of the broad masses proved vital in the expansion of Communist power during the Second Sino-Japanese War. When the Communists steadily expanded their revolutionary bases in the north, they encountered a highly militarized and fragmented society. The decentralization of political power and widespread local militarization had led to a proliferation of firearms in the rural areas. In addition to bandit groups and

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[13] For the origins and influence of the Long March see Benjamin Yang, *From Revolution to Politics: Chinese Communists on the Long March* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1900).

[14] For a general introduction on the activities of the CCP in wartime China see Lyman P. Van Slyke, "The Chinese Communist Movement during the Sino-Japanese War, 1937-1945," in *The Nationalist Era in China, 1927-1949*, ed. Lloyd E. Eastman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991),177-290.

community-based forces, landlords and peasants armed with modern firearms also became the CCP's major target for mobilization. This section argues that the mobilization of the armed populace was an integral part of the CCP's revolutionary project in North China. In order to understand how the CCP survived in the militarized society and enlisted armed civilians in its revolutionary cause, it is necessary to first look at the new political situations in which Communist cadres exercised their mobilization skills. An overview of the CCP's mobilization tactics and strategies then follows, which is necessary because these strategies were thoroughly adopted when the Communist cadres actively mobilized individuals and groups equipped with guns.

The Political Turmoil and Prevalence of Guns in Northern China

In order to understand how the CCP seized the opportunity to form an alliance with the armed populace in North China, it is necessary to first look at the social and political situation. Generally speaking, the regions in which the Communists were extraordinary active were mainly rural societies over which the Nationalist government and the Japanese had limited control. For example, Henan Province, which had suffered from constant warfare and banditry since the 1920s, witnessed the increasing militarization of the local society.[15] During wartime the

[15] According to Phil Billingsley's investigation, Henan Province had the highest number of bandits in Republican-period China. The province was transformed into a "cradle of banditry." See Phil Billingsley, *Bandits in Republican China*, 40-70. Sociologist He Xiya also estimates that the total number of bandits in Henan may have reached 51,100 by 1924. See He Xiya, *Zhongguo daofei wenti zhi*. Henan Province suffered from constant military conflicts during the warlord period. As discussed in the introduction chapter, Henan in the 1920s became a hotly contested area among warlords who competed to exercise their control of the province. Local elite or predatory warlords organized militia forces, which also transformed the power structure in the local society and accelerated local militarization. For social transformation in Henan see Xin Zhang, *Social Transformation in Modern China*.

Nationalist government loosened its hold on the province, which gave the Japanese and the CCP opportunities to strengthen their presence.[16] While the Japanese mainly controlled the urban centers and major transportation lines, the CCP's expansion occurred primarily behind the Japanese.

A similar situation happened in other northern provinces as well, where previous warlords still preserved their power. This prevented the penetration of the central government's authority. With the completion of the North Expedition in 1928, Chiang Kai-shek and his Nanjing government aimed to claim central authority over the northern provinces as one crucial part of his state-building program. However, Chiang's national unification campaign was completed through a collaboration with warlords in the north, who retained their political power in Hebei, Shandong, Shanxi, and Henan.[17] Even within these provinces the peirod of warlordism had left a legacy in which the local society was controlled by regional military commanders, whose power was secured by their ability to organize military forces.[18]

The Japanese invasion and the escape of the Nationalist government and some local elites altered the political landscape in the rural areas of North China, leaving a significant power

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[16] After the outbreak of the Macro Polo Bridge Incident in 1937 the Nationalist army failed to stem the advance the Japanese invasion, which resulted in a Nationalist strategic retreat to the south. See Parks M. Coble, *Facing Japan: Chinese Politics and Japanese Imperialism, 1931-1937* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1991).

[17] Most of the military commanders joined the Nationalist Party and were appointed as chairmen of respective provinces. Han Fuqu served as the chairman of Shandong before 1938. Yan Xishan controlled all of Shanxi Province until 1949. For Han Fuqu's activity in Shandong see Sherman Xiaogang Lai, *A Springboard to Victory: Shandong Province and Chinese Communist Military and Financial Strength, 1937-1945* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 1-23.

[18] James Sheridan asserts that the military commanders survived after the Northern Expedition and held sway over large parts of each province. See James E. Sheridan, *Chinese Warlord: The Career of Feng Yu-hsiang* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), 14-6.

vacuum. The weakness of the central government became worse after the outbreak of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident in 1937. In Hebei Province the defeat of the Nationalist 29th Army in 1937 made Song Zheyuan (宋哲元 1885-1940), a former warlord who controlled the province, lose his political prominence in the region. The Japanese Imperial Army then quickly occupied Hebei and Chahar. Han Fuqu, the chairman of the Shandong provincial government, was arrested and executed in early 1938, leaving a governmental vacuum in the province. The situation in Henan was much more complex. The central government never practiced direct control over the entire province. Government and regional military commanders shared their political interests to manage local affairs. After the outbreak of the war with Japan the Nationalist armies, which failed to stem the Japanese advance, retreated southward. From late 1938 the Japanese controlled all of eastern Henan Province.[19]

[19] For the political situation in North China in the 1930s see Marjorie Dryburgh, *North China and Japanese Expansion, 1933-1937: Regional Power and the National Interest* (London: Routledge, 2004).

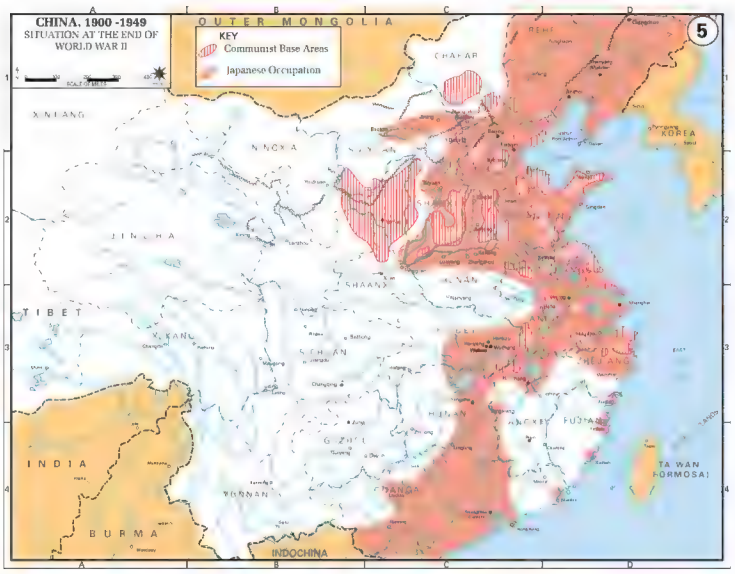

Figure 10. The Political Situation in Wartime China. "Sino-US Relations during World War II," accessed July 12, 2017, http://sino-american-relations.weebly.com/home/sino-us-relations-during-world-war-ii.

After China's failure in 1937 major Nationalist armies in the north were ordered to retreat to the south, which also weakened the government presence in the northern provinces. As Communist general Zhu De (朱德 1886-1959) commented in 1937, "the remaining Nationalist troops lacked the capability to coordinate the fight with the Japanese. The fighting plan created by the central government was not carried out effectively."[20] In the meantime, the Japanese did not stop their military advance in the north, sweeping through major cities in Hebei, Shandong, and Henan provinces and controlling the main lines of transportation. In many instances officials of local governments retreated to interior sites to escape the Japanese invasion. Many landlords and local elites also fled from the Japanese-occupied areas. Behind these areas the Communists were dedicated to expanding their sphere of influence in the rural areas. They gradually organized local governments and put their political authority into practice.

[20] Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenxian Yanjiushi 中共中央文獻研究室, *Wenxian he Yanjiu* 文獻與研究 (Documents and Research) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1988), 236.

In additional to the weak central power and Japanese invasion, northern provinces witnessed rural militarization in the early twentieth century. Most northern provinces had a long tradition of forming collective armed forces, such as the famous Red Spear.[21] The collapse of Nationalist regime and the Japanese occupation accelerated the process of local militarization. In the late 1930s this culture of collective violence continued to play a role in most rural communities. Local gentry, bandits, and militarists all organized armed forces based on their community. Some defeated Nationalist military commanders carved out territorial bases for themselves in these localities. A number of landlords purchased weapons and organized their independent force to protect their families and communities. These forces existed in a variety of forms. Some armed forces had a collective-defense nature. For example, in Henan Province wealthy local gentry organized "house-watching aquads" (护院团), "village pacts" (联庄会), and "joint defense squads" (联防队).[22] These local gentry had channels to acquire better weapons. In many regions the gentry brought these armed forces together and formed joint defense battalions.

As mentioned in the introduction, influenced by these local elites the ordinary peasants also obtained weapons for self-defense purposes. The prevalence of private gun ownership in Henan had been grasped by local Communist cadres, who conductd social surveys to determine the possible ways in which these guns could be mobilized (the CCP's social survey is discussed later in this chapter). The northern provinces had similar reasons for the prevalence of guns.

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[21] The Red Spear Society was organized by peasants in the early 1920s for defense against bandits. The society quickly spread throughout the northern provinces. Elizabeth Perry argues that the Red Spear reflected local peasants' protective strategy for survival. See Perry, *Rebels and Revolutionaries*, 81-88.

[22] See Odoric Y.K. Wou, *Mobilizing the Masses,* 177-80.

First, Shandong, Henan, Hebei, and other northern provinces were traditional areas known for their frequent banditry.[23] In the shadow of bandit activities, peasants and landlords took up guns for self-defense. Second, these provinces also suffered from chronic warfare in the 1920s. Military weapons fell into the hands of either bandits or ordinary peasants.

To sum up, when the Communists entered the northern provinces, the party encountered a completely different social and political situation in which various political entities, including Nationalist rampant soldiers, bandits, local armed forces, and Japanese invaders, coexisted in these provinces. The local society was increasingly militarized. The weak governmental presence in the northern provinces meant that large numbers of guns owned by peasants or landlords had not been regulated or detected by the Nationalist government. This new situation provided the Communists with an opportunity to expand their influence, in which the organization of armed civilians served as one integral part of its overall revolutioanry agenda.

Mobilization Tactics

The idea of a mass line (群眾路線 *qunzhong luxian*) strategy proved crucial to the CCP's dramatic development. Behind enemy lines, the Communists were making every effort to launch a social revolution at the grassroots level through which the masses of the rural sectors would be mobilized. In so doing, the CCP was able to claim political legitimacy and succeeded in gaining people's support in anti-Japanese activities and the Communist expansion. Historical research on the CCP's mobilization strategies has been abundant. Historians have provided a set of

[23] See Phil Billingsley, *Bandits in Republican China*, 28-39.

interpretive frameworks, asserting variously that the commitment to nationalism, socioeconomic policies, organizational control, and democratic management have played vital roles.[24]

Much of the scholarship directed at the CCP's grassroots effort inevitably touches on two issues: how to gain popular support, and how to get masses involved. In the first place, the CCP modified its radical policies during the Jiangxi Soviet period, when all landlords and gentry were shorn of most political and economic rights, by making a number of moderate moves. Under what Mark Selden has termed the "Yenan way," attempts were steadily made to secure peasants' economic status.[25] In the base areas the party halted the radical policy of land confiscation as they did in Jiangxi, and rapidly promoted a program of rents, taxes, and interest reduction. Popular support also stemmed from peasants' awareness of political consciousness. Mao Zedong ordered the establishment of representative assemblies in base areas and devised the "three-thirds systems," which not only aimed to win the adherence of nonparty elites but also to facilitate the political participation of poor peasants in local communities.[26] In many regions peasants who had previously exercised no rights were elected to serve as village heads or representatives to the CCP National Congress.[27] In so doing, the role of the gentry was shattered

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[24] The CCP's mobilization efforts have been interpreted either as a hegemonizing process or as people's voluntary participation. For a historiographical review see Pauline Keating, "Getting Peasants Organized: Village Organizations and the Party-State in the Shaan Gan Ning Border Region, 1934-1945," in *North China at War: The Social Ecology of Revolution, 1937-1945*, 26.

[25] Selden, *The Yenan Way in Revolutionary China.*

[26] Mao Zedong devised a three-thirds system in a united government in the Communist Revolutionary bases. In accordance with the united front principle, the allocation of seats in the local government organ was to be one-third communist cadres, one-third non-CCP left progressive elements, and one-third intermediate sections who were neither left nor right. See Xiaowei Zang, *Elite Dualism and Leadership Section in China* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 39.

[27] See Selden, *The Yenan Way in Revolutionary China*, 384.

in the traditional power structure. In wartime China the "mass line" strategy became one cornerstone of Communist ideology in building a reciprocal relationship between the CCP and the general public.

Despite the fact that the party agreed to form a united front with traditional elites and advocated a series of moderate social policies for the sake of the anti-Japanese war, it did not abandon the class struggle to fulfill its revolutionary goals. In practice, priority was given to mobilizing the poor peasantry against local despots and landlords. Communist cadres made the peasants organize numerous peasants association, a crucial step in taking part in local affairs and challenging village elites. Communist work teams provided educational sessions to ensure that the peasants would be protected if they took action against the elites, and to indoctrinate the masses about Communist ideology. As Elizabeth Perry has demonstrated, the CCP proved adept at using emotion to excite peasants' hatred of their class enemies.[28] The public forums for "speaking bitterness" (诉苦 *suku*) or "criticism and self-criticism" (批評與自我批評 *piping yu two piping*), for example, were frequently organized by local Communist cadres. To resolve the problem of peasants' unresponsiveness to the program against their previous masters, as Chen Yung-fa vividly puts it, struggle-meetings involving landlords and their "neighbors, relatives, and bystanders in quarrels" were held to provoke peasants into openly expressing their anger against the traditional elite, through which the preexisting solidarity in the local communities had been disrupted.[29]

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[28] Elizabeth Perry, "Moving the Masses: Emotion Work in the Chinese Revolution," *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 7 (2002): 111-28.

[29] Yung-fa Chen, *Making Revolution: The Communist Movement in Eastern and Central China, 1937-1945*, 220.

Paralleling the effort to polarize the masses and traditional rural elite, the party devoted considerable attention to ensuring the political compliance of the popular armed forces. During the first half of the twentieth century, privately organized forces had sprung up in North China due to social and political turbulence. The growth of banditry and the Japanese invasion made it necessary for the local communities to create these defense forces, which generally took the form of self-defense corps (自衛隊 *ziwei dui*) and militia (民兵 *minbing*), though they varied in their names and organizational structure.[30] The party envisioned these spontaneous armed forces not only as auxiliary forces to assist the Eighth Route Army and the New Fourth Army, but also as one major vehicle for mobilizing the masses into the Communist movement. Immediately after the Second United Front was established in 1937 the CCP Central Committee issued the *Instruction of Organizing Local Work in Wartime*, in which local Communist cadres were ordered to utilize and organize "any forms of traditional armed forces, including militia, peace preservation forces (保安隊 *baoandui*), able-bodied forces (壯丁隊 *zhuangdingdui*), and volunteer army (義勇軍 *yiyongjun*)," and to try "by all means to play a guiding role in these forces."[31] A few months later another order was made to "train and assist popular forces in all aspects to improve their political awareness and military skills."[32]

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[30] According to Chinese historian Wei Hongyun, local anti-Japanese forces can be categorized into two forces: the Self-defense Corps and the militia. The major difference is that the former recruited any individual between sixteen and fifty-five years old, while the militiamen were selected among the Song. See Wei Hongyun, "Social Reform and Value Change in the Jin Cha Ji Anti-Japanese Border Region," in *North China at War: The Social Ecology of Revolution*, 99.

[31] Zhongyang Dang'anguan 中央檔案館, ed. *Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenjian Xuanji* 中共中央文件選編 (Selection of documents of the central committee of the CCP), Vol. 11 (Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 2004), 319.

[32] Ibid., 483.

The importance of various militia forces was always highlighted in both the battles with the Japanese and in the revolutionary enterprise. In 1937 Liu Bocheng (劉伯承 1892-1986) used a metaphor to describe the importance of militia forces, stating that "a regular troop is the bone, a guerrilla is a tendon, and the militia is muscle." An effective military campaign was produced by coordination among these three groups.[33] Under orders from the Central Committee, local Communist cadres always highlighted the role of militia forces in their fight against enemies.[34] As Odoric Y.K. Wou's research suggests, the important roles of militia forces lay first in their familiarity with the local conditions, and second, in their lower level of vulnerability to enemy attack because they "formed small targets."[35] To encourage people's participation in militia forces, local Communist cadres held educational meetings that led the people to believe they were fighting for themselves。

It is clear from the above discussion that the Communist revolution was composed of both a social revolution and military campaign. The strategies that the CCP adopted to involve the masses also applied to the armed population. When the Communists arrived in North China, what awaited them was a highly-militarized society. The frequent military conflicts led to a proliferation of weapons among civilians. Banditry and increasing social chaos made many people arm themselves with guns to defend their communities. The CCP's activities in mobilizing an armed populace was one integral party of their mobilization activities. It turns out

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[33] Liu Bocheng, Liu Bocheng Junshi Wenxuan 劉伯承軍事文選 (Selections of the Military Documents of Liu Bocheng) (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 1992), 62.

[34] One example was Peng Xuefeng, who always emphasized the role of militia forces in the war against the Japanese. See Lü Jingzhi 呂敬之, "Henansheng Zhan Shi Sunshi Diaocha Baogao 河南省戰時損失調查報告" (Investigation on the war damage in Henan Province). *Minguo Dangan* 民國檔案 (Republican Archives), no.4 (1990): 24-45.

[35] Odoric Y.K. Wou, *Mobilizing the Masses: Building Revolution in Henan,* 230.

that the strategies and tactics that the CCP adopted to embrace the masses were applicable to its activities towards the armed masses. For the CCP, an armed populace was crucial in the war, because in many cases these people's arms provided the party with weapons, particularly the Communist forces that encountered a shortage of arms. Another strategic importance of the armed masses lay in the prospect that these masses could function in the revolution because they were empowered by gun ownership. The next two sections consider how these two reasons integrated together led to the mobilization of the armed masses.

The Problem of Weapons

The lack of weapons was a consistently major concern of the CCP before the end of 1945, when the Soviets turned over the weapons of defeated Japanese armies in Manchuria to the Communists.[36] As the Red Army waged a guerrilla war in the Jiangxi Soviet region in the early 1930s the soldiers armed them with primitive equipment, including traditional bird guns, spears, and swords, while modern rifles or pistols were scarce.[37] Despite the fact that the Red Army, led by Mao Zedong and Zhu De, survived in Jiangxi and maintained some small arsenals, it was

[36] Michael Sheng, *Battling Western Imperialism: Mao, Stalin, and the United State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 110-11.

[37] Jiangxisheng Dang'anguan 江西省檔案館, ed. "Difang Wuzhuang de Zuzhi Bianzhi he Junshi Xunlian Jueyian 地方武装的組織編制和軍事訓練決議案" (The resolution on the organization and military training of the local armed forces), in *Zhongyang geming genjudi shiliao xuanbian* 中央革命根據地史料選編 (Selections of documents of the Central Revolutionary Base), Vol 2 (Nanchang: Jiangxi renminchubanshe, 1982), 563-65.

unable to supply sufficient weapons to all of its soldiers.[38] Shao Shiping (邵式平 1900-1965), the commander of the independent regiment of the Red Army, offers a firsthand account of how invaluable the guns were. In the early 1930s Shao was optimistic about the army's active recruitment of soldiers but was worried about the shortage of firearms. This was reflected in a popular saying in the army, "There were far more people than guns, and the bullets fared far worse."[39] Shao's regiment made every effort to secure their logistics supply. He finally managed to purchase two foreign guns, one Browning and one Colt, from a nearby city at an exorbitant price, though only the Browning pistol came with bullets. A few days later both pistols had broken, but for several months Shao's regiment was unable to find anyone to fix them. Even so, these nonworking guns functioned well in deterring local tyrants.[40]

Other memoirs by Red Army veterans provide moving accounts about the lack of weapons. In his memoir Liu Desheng (劉德勝), who had joined the army in 1930, recalled that no rifles or pistols were available to recruits until they succeeded in seizing enough enemy weapons.[41] The heavy financial burden of the Red Army and the GMD military blockade

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[38] "Di Shiba Jituanjun Zongbu Jungongbu Yijiusiling Nian Gongzuo Zongjie 第十八集團軍總部軍工部一九四零年工作總結" (Working summary of the Logistics Department of the Eighteenth Army in 1940), in *Zhongguo Jindai Bingqi Gongye dangan Shiliao* 中國近代兵器工業檔案史料 (Historical documents on Chinese military industry), vol. 4 (Beijing: Bingqi gongye chubanshe, 1993), 21-23.

[39] Shao Shiping, *Qiang de Gushi* 槍的故事 (The Story of the Gun) (Beijing: Zuojia chubanshe, 1959), 1.

[40] Ibid., 2.

[41] Ibid., 6.

restrained the Communists from obtaining sufficient weapons.[42] Before the Red Army settled in Yan'an in 1936 it depended strongly on confiscated guns from local bullies or defeated enemies. Edgar Snow, the author of *Red Star Over China*, observed in 1938 that:

> The Reds had a very limited output of armaments: their enemy was really their main source of supply. For years the Red had called the Kuomintang troops their "ammunition carriers," and they claimed to capture more than 80 per cent of their guns and more than 70 per cent of their ammunition from enemy troops. The regular troops (as dstinct from local partisans) I saw were equipped mainly with British, Czechoslovakian, German, and American machine guns, rifles, automatic rifles, Mausers, and mountain cannon, such as had been sold in large quantities to the Nanking Government.[43]

There did not appear to have been any significant improvement of the supply of weapons even after 1936, when the Nationalist government agreed to lift the arms embargo to the Communist troops. After the Xi'an incident both parties reached a military agreement under which the GMD promised to appropriate guns and ammunition. Zhu De (朱德 1886-1976), the commander in chief of the Red Army once noted that by 1940 the Nationalist government was providing a monthly aid of 680,000 *yuan* in *fabi*, along with eight million bullets.[44] In the meantime, all divisions of the Eighth Route Army had constructed factories of varying scale that produced a wide range of weaponry, ranging from rifles and pistols to grenades and land mines.[45] According to a CCP report dated February 10, 1941, the party's largest military facility in Shanxi at that time had a production capacity of 3,360 rifles per year. Nevertheless, the

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[42] As for the military supply from the Nationalist government to the CCP, see *Maochun Yu, The Dragon's War: Allied Operations and the Fate of China, 1937-1947* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2006).

[43] Edgar Snow, *Red Star Over China*: *The Classic Account of the Birth of Chinese Communism* (New York: Grove Press, 1968), 260.

[44] Jiageng Chen, *The Memoirs of Tan Kah-kee* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1994), 239.

[45] *Zhongguo Jindai Bingqi Gongye Dangan Shiliao*, vol 4, 17.

Nationalist appropriation and self-production could hardly support an army of over 500,000. The CCP's dependence on outside military aid became unstable in late 1938, and ultimately came to an end as the GMD-CCP United Front suffered an irreversible split in the New Fourth Army incident of 1941. The military facilities operating in the base areas were unable to provide sufficient arms for all soldiers. Other statistics show that the military factory of the 115th Division only produced 292 rifles in 1941.

How did the Communist forces overcome the lack of weapons? With the increase in its military power after 1937, the military commanders explicitly encouraged their soldiers to do all they could to collect weapons abandoned or surrendered by the enemy from battlefields, just as they did in Jiangxi and on the way to Yan'an.[46] According to a military report, the Eighth Route Army seized 207,000 pistols and rifles, 1,106 machine guns, 16,800 pieces of ammunition, and many other weapons as it swept aside the Puppet Army in Shandong Province during the eight years of war.[47] The source does not reveal how the Communists obtained these weapons from defeated soldiers. Given the frequent battles between the Eighth Route Army and the Puppet Army in Shandong, it was possible to capture a large amount of guns and ammunition. However, weapons from the defeated soldiers could not support all Communist troops. As mentioned above, the primitive arsenals were operated by local Communist branches. It was imperative for

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[46] "Di Shiba Jituanjun Zongbu Jungongbu Yijiusiling Nian Gongzuo Zongjie 第十八集團軍總部軍工部一九四零年工作總結."

[47] "Shandong Balujun Banian Kangzhan Zhanji Tongjibiao 山東八路軍八年抗戰戰績統計表," in *Shandong Kangri Genjudi* 山東抗日根據地 (Anti-Japanese base in Shandong), ed. Zhonggong Shandong Shengwei Dangshi Ziliao Zhengji Weiyuanhui 中共山東省委黨史資料徵集研究委員會 (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshiziliao chubanshe, 1989), 621.

the Communist forces, which had limited access to any outside sources, to secure other channels for procuring weapons.

Arming and Disarming the Masses

The current scholarly literature gives much attention to the CCP's effort to gain the alliance of heterodox forces such as the armed bandits. As Phil Billingsley observes, the Communists adopted a pragmatic approach that allowed a coalition to be formed with bandits. In a community where bandits brought social chaos and had little public support, the CCP sought to suppress these groups to win respect from the peasants. In many other cases in which the bandits had close ties with their community, the party utilized both military and political means to gain adherence from the bandits. The establishment of military dominance over the bandit groups laid the foundation for the CCP to form an alliance with them.[48]

What the current scholarship has overlooked is how the CCP dealt with a large number of armed individuals who had obtained guns in this era of consistent warfare and social unrest. Many strategies that were adopted to mobilize the masses also gained importance. Considerable efforts were made to make use of civilian weapons in the revolutionary campaign. As mentioned above, the CCP, now headquartered in Yen'an, was good at using class struggle to mobilize the ordiarmy peasants againt local elites or power holders. The makeup of the ordinary armed people in local society was highly varied in terms of their social class. The CCP adopted different strategies towards different armed people. To utilize the armed masses in its revolutionary cause, the party placed its gun policies in its overall rural mobilizatio pragrams.

[48] Phil Billingsley, *Bandits in Republican China*, 226-70.

Identifying Gun Owners in the Local Society

The party devoted much attention to investigating the scale of private gun ownership in the local society. When the Communists arrived at a location, determining the degree of civilian gun ownership became one of their priorities. The investigation included the number of guns in the village, the political affiliation of local elites, and the places where people stored their weapons. The survey reports sent to Yan'an played an instrumental part in establishing mobilization strategies.

In early 1940 Wei Gongzhi (危拱之 1908-1973), a female Communist cadre, conducted a detailed investigation in Western Henan Province. Her report provides some perspective on how local cadres viewed the importance of the armed populace in their activities. When Wei Gongzhi arrived in Henan she was shocked by the prevalence of guns in the local society. She was not able to determine how many guns were owned by ordinary individuals, but did estimate that the majority of guns were controlled by community-based armed forces, the number of which was impossible to estimate. Because some collective-defense forces were registered with the local government, she used these officially sanctioned forces to attest to the popularity of arms. For example, the visible militia forces in the thirteen counties of Nanyang city controlled at least 130,000 rifles or guns. "More than 10,000 guns were owned in the counties like Xinyang 信陽, Runan 汝南, and Xiangcheng 襄城. Even the less militarized counties had 3,000 to 5,000 guns." Wei listed the numbers of militia forces in these counties, as shown below.[49]

[49] Wei Gongzhi, "Guanyu Yunan Wuzhuang Gongzuo Buchong Baogao 關於豫南武裝工作補充報告," 89.

County	Number of Guns	County	Number of Guns
Nanzhao	5,000	Tanghe	1,2000
Neixiang	4,0000	Wuyang	8,000
Yexian	9000	Zhenping	5,000
Xichuan	5,000	Fangcheng	8,000
Tongbai	5,000	Miyang	8,000
Xinye	7,000	Dengxian	8,000

Table 5. The Numbers of Milita Forces in Western Henan

Wei Gongzhi believed that the actual number of guns owned by either militia forces or ordinary peasants went far beyond the numbers listed above since the majority of guns were not reported to the government. She concluded that the proliferation of modern firearms had already become part of Henan's social ecology.

According to Wei, there were at least four sources for the masses to obtain guns. First, almost all the counties in Henan had locally- based arsenals that were operated by either the government or by landlords. Private manufacturers concealed their arsenals in rural villages. The landlords then sold their guns to individuals and groups. Second, the frequent military conflicts from the 1920s scattered a large number of guns throughout the local society. Third, bandit groups or secret societies controlled a large numbers of guns. "It was reported that some ambitious peasants seized the weapons from warlords' armies."[50] Fourth, most wealthy families

[50] Ibid.

purchased advanced weapons from urban cities, where more-sophisticated guns could be obtained.

The types of guns owned by peasants or landlords varied. Wei Gongzhi was delighted that the quality of these privately owned guns was better than in other provinces. Roughly 40 percent of these guns were forged locally in the primitive arsenals. She also acknowledged the fact that class differences were obvious among gun owners, since most peasants owned primitive arms while wealthy landlords carried better ones.

Wei Gongzhi's social survey was one example of many carried out by local cadres. According to Wei, these reports allowed the Communists to designate specific policies targeting armed individuals of different classes. Additionally, in many cases local Communist cadres conducted these social surveys before they initiated their mobilization activities. One newspaper report stressed the importance of conducting these social surveys before penetrating rural settlements. Communist cadres were aware that the village head who dominated local power was always reluctant to have their villagers' guns confiscate or mobilized. The survey about the number of guns in the village was vital because it precluded the village head from concealing their weapons.

The use of class in the control of guns

As discussed above, one of the major tools that the CCP used in their mobilization efforts was the use of class distinction. In this way different policies were adopted that targeted people of different classes. The CCP's ideology of mobilizing the peasants as its priority was applicable to its gun policies as well. As discussed above, peasants were always willing to collaborate with the party; the difficulty came with the local elites or landlords. In practice, the Communist cadres

took advantage of the collaborated poor peasants, who were ordered to persuade the landlords to surrender their arms. In her report to Yan'an, Wei Gongzhi reported one effective way of obtaining guns from landlords in which poor peasants played a major role. Wei noticed that many poor peasants owned no guns while the landlords possessed large numbers. Landlords normally hired local peasants to carry guns to protect their properties.[51] It should be noted that these landlords were not powerful enough to organize community-based forces; they simply hired peasants to patrol their property at night. Local Communist cadres saw this as an opportunity, and encouraged poor peasants to work for landlords. Wei Gongzhi believed that once these peasants received the guns these weapons could be used by the party.

Mass associations were widely organized and became an effective tool to penetrate into the local society. In South Hebei Province, for example, the CCP first instructed the mass associations about the importance of surrendering their guns and ordered these mass associations to force landlords to surrender their guns. Under these methods, the pressure was intense. In Xushui County of Hebei Province if rifle owners refused to surrender their guns to the party, the mass association would ask them to volunteer themselves. If the owners refused again, the association used another persuasive effort, such as by surrounding the landlord's house and applying collective persuasion.

Educational Meetings

When the Communists arrived in Hebei, Shandong, and Henan provinces, they were well aware of the proliferation of arms among the ordinary rural population. To win the support of these armed civilian was not an easy task, given the complexity of the social categories of these

[51] Ibid., 101.

armed people. As mentioned above, the CCP adopted specific policies toward heterodox armed groups, who were either surrendered to the Communist army or suffered from bloody suppression if their resistance was resolute. However, like many other orthodox armed people, their stance could not be overly simplified. The Communists had two methods of dealing with these armed peasants. First, the party members encouraged these armed people to surrender their arms as a way of directly supporting the Communist military campaign. Second, if armed peasants were reluctant to surrender their weapons, the Communists aimed to organize them into militia forces. To fulfill these two targets local Communist cadres designed a series of educational programs to convey an ideology to the local peasants in which the Communists' gun policy was justified.

A propaganda program was always introduced. In many villages in Hebei and Henan, for example, Communist cadres organized the educational meeting. In the meeting the CCP demonstrated their strong military presence and justified their efforts to stamp out Japanese invasions or local bandits. In Ruxian County of Hebei Province, for example, local CCP troops cooperated with community forces to eliminate the bandits, thus promoting a different image of themselves as the protector of the citizens. In this way, local peasants welcomed the CCP and wanted to attend the educational meetings. In one meeting one leader of the CCP branch told the peasants that "it was the CCP troops who defended the country actively and protected the local community from bandits. Thus all the armies should be utilized in a proper force that fights for the people." [52]

[52] "Gongfei Zenyang Shoujiao Minqiang 共匪怎樣收繳民槍" (How did the Communists collect civilians' guns?), *Wanbao* 皖報, June 24, 1942.

To resolve the peasants' worry that their rights of self-defense would be taken away, the cadre stated, "The people's guns are owned by people. The purpose of owning a gun is absolutely to protect the people. Therefore the CCP respects and guarantees the people's rights to arm themselves. However, to defend the people and their community effectively, we think they will exert the largest effect only if the CCP manages these weapons. The party will not confiscate their guns, but use considerable ways to utilize these weapons to make sure they play their role as expected." In Henan Province, for example, the CCP cadres actively conveyed to the people that their right to own a gun would be protected and that their weapons would be used to defend themselves.[53] In these educational meetings the party rarely told the peasants that the party would confiscate their guns; rather, they told the peasants that weapons would be mobilized and organized in their community.

Gun Registration

To strengthen their control of guns, the Communists quickly enacted decrees that made the armed masses register their weapons. Gun registration was carried out as a common way to make sure the armed masses used their guns in the proper way. In his seminal work on the Communist movement in eastern and central China, Yung-fa Chen finds that the local Communist government "required all rifle owners, including communities as public owners, to register their weapons with the *Hsiang* government."[54] Local governments issued permits to gun owners, who had to prove that their use of the gun would be for self-defense. Such policies were

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[53] Qiao Jinou 喬金鷗, "Kangzhan Shiqi Zhonggong zai Lunxianqu de Kuochong Shouduan 抗戰時期中共在淪陷區的擴充手段" (The CCP's efforts to strengthen its power during the Second Sino-Japanese War), *Gongdang Wenti Yanjiu* 共黨問題研究 no.11 (1965): 69-76.

[54] Yung-fa Chen, *Making Revolution: The Communist Movement in Eastern and Central China, 1937-1945*, 282.

effectively enforced only when the CCP consolidated their power in the region. However, the implementation of gun registration was determined by the power base of the party. When the party's power was relatively weak in regions where either the Nationalist government or local elites dominated the local power structure, the party always tended to conceal unregistered guns. In Henan Province, for example, party cadres deliberately kept unregistered guns hidden from the Nationalist government. These guns would later be mobilized without being noticed by the government.[55]

Confiscating Guns from the Armed Masses

When the CCP cadres became aware of the degree of private gun ownership, the next step was to take advantage of these weapons. One of their purposes was to acquire the weapons when the CCP troops lacked military weapons. Their policies varied from place to place, and time to time. Besides educational meetings, in Western Henan Province, where the ownership of firearms was a community effort, the CCP first established a model in the village who agreed to surrender their weapons. The collective meeting was then held to encourage other villagers to surrender their weapons. However, not every peasant or landlord was willing to turn in their weapons. In such cases the CCP would use coercive means to force armed landlords to surrender their weapons. Local peasants were informed if the local gentry refused to surrender their weapons and received punishment; they were then more willing to cooperate with the party to avoid such coercive action.[56]

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[55] Wei Gongzhi, "Guanyu Yunan Wuzhuang Gongzuo Buchong Baogao 關於豫南武裝工作補充報告,"100.

[56] "Shouqiang 收槍" (Collecting guns), *Xinhua Zhoukan* 新華週刊, 3, no.4 (1949): 19-20.

The local province also used "gun borrowing" to acquire guns from local peasants. If a local cadre discovered that some landlords had recently obtained new guns, they sometimes asked them to "borrow" their guns. However, the practice of borrowing was coercive. In Heze County of Shandong Province, one local Communist cadre wrote out a certificate regarding borrowing a gun from a landlord. It stated, "It has been heard that the landlord owns a pistol with five [pieces of] ammunition. To support the war against Japanese invasion, the Communist Party requests that you loan the gun to the local Communist troops. We know you are open-minded and supportive; please be sure to surrender your weapons. Otherwise you will be arrested."[57]

Conclusion

This chapter connects private gun ownership with the Communist movement in 1930s and 1940s China. It again proves the overall thesis of this dissertation, that any government entity's policy toward armed civilians was contigent and dynamic. When the CCP arrived at northern China they encountered a highly militarized and fragmented society. This provided the CCP with both challenges and opportunities. While previous studies have focused exclusively on how armed groups, such as bandits, militia forces, or secret societies, were either suppressed or mobilized by the Communists, my research in this chapter places the ordinary armed civilian at the center of inquiry. As this chapter argues, the CCP deliberately adopted different approaches that targeted people of different classes in their mobilization work. Armed peasants were the first group that Communist cadres approached, who were then encouraged to assist the party in making landlords or the elite turn in their guns. The CCP's policy towards armed civilians were thus a dynamic process, adopting different stances towards different social class.

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[57] "Gongfei Zenyang Shoujiao Minqiang 共匪怎樣收繳民槍" (How did the Communists collect civilians' guns?), *Wanbao* 皖報, June 24, 1942.

Local Communist cadres either organized the armed civilians into guerrilla units or confiscated private guns for their military use. The mobilization of armed civilians in rural society played an important role in strengthening the CCP's military power from 1937 to 1945.

~ EPILOGUE AND CONCLUSION ~

Disarming the People in the Early Years of the People's Republic of China

1949, the fourth year of the war between the KMT and the CCP, opened with brilliant victories for the CCP. Having liberated the entire northeast, most of the north, and central China through three major campaigns, in October, the Communist forces, which now numbered over five million, quickly drove Chiang Kai-shek and his Nationalist forces out of Mainland China. With the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the new Communist regime launched a series of political campaigns and programs to consolidate political control and to buttress its legitimacy. Of the many forms of political culture created by the Communist government, the Monument to the People's Heroes (人民英雄紀念碑, Renmin yingxiong jinianbei), on which eight reliefs were sculpted, was one of the most prominent. As historian Chang-tai Hung puts it, the reliefs which displayed most important historical events in modern China reflected the Chinese Communists' attempts to use history to promote their prescribed political agenda, and to "monopolize collective memory."[1] The *War of Resistance against Japan* was carved on the western side of the monument, which depicted the contribution of the CCP-led ordinary people led by the CCP to victory. In the relief, the designer told a narrative scene of the Chinese peasants' energetic participation in guerrilla warfare: peasants with their weapons in hand were ready to fight; an old woman gave her son a gun and persuaded him to kill enemies. The relief on the War of Resistance against Japan did not explicitly portray major battles that the CCP fought,

[1] Chang-tai Hung, *Mao's New World, Political Culture in the Early People's Republic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 254. The eight reliefs include the Opium War, the Taiping Rebellion, the Revolution of 1911, the May Fourth Movement, the May Thirtieth Movement, the Nanchang Uprising, the War of Resistance against Japan, and the Yangzi Crossing by the Red Army. As Hung argues, the building of the Monument was a politically highly contested project. For the choice of historical events, see Hung, *Mao's New World*, 235-256.

but placed the masses at center stage. As represented in the portrayal, the new Communist government particularly reinforced and glorified the active role of the armed masses, who took up their guns to join the revolutionary cause.

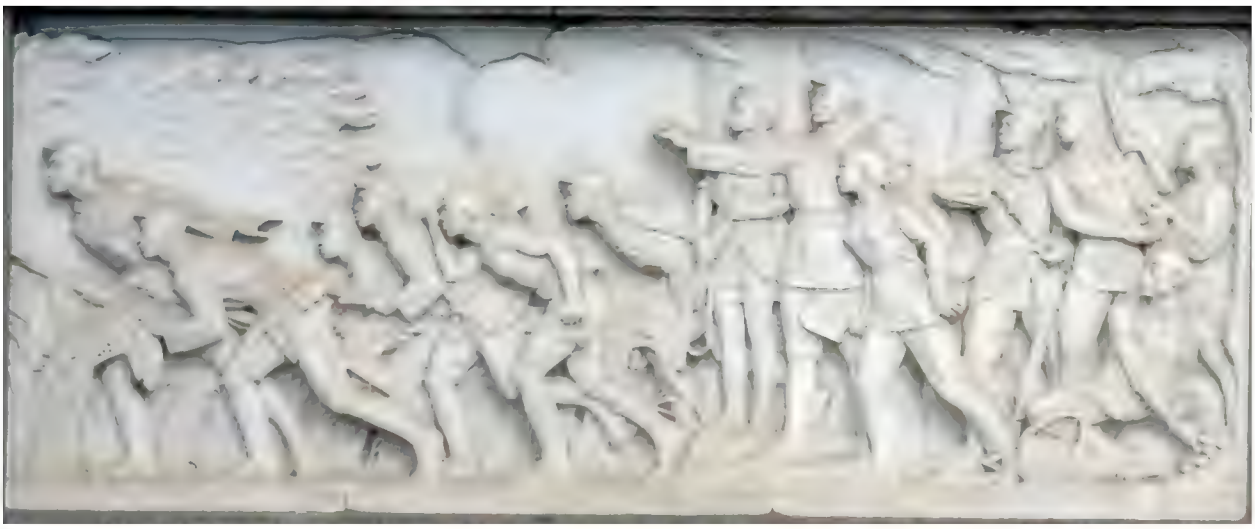

Figure 11. Relief Sculpture, *War of Resistance Against Japan* on the Monument to the People's Heroes.

The relief on the monument that highlights the sacrifice of the armed peasants was in line with Party policy to mobilize the armed people in the Communist Revolution before 1949. As I analyzed in chapter five, the CCP saw the peasants with guns as a power to be reckoned within its revolutionary agenda in the rural base areas in North China. When the revolution entered the consolidation phase after 1949, the Communist government took the opposite stand, seeking to assert its monopoly on the use of guns. In Guangdong, for example, the local government collected over 500,000 guns or rifles by September 1953.[2] In the early 1950s, mass movements and campaigns that were aimed to disarm the local populace could occur in almost any regions where gun ownership was prevalent during the turbulent Republican period. As one integral part

[2] Dangdai Guangdong Yanjiuhui 當代廣東研究會, *Dangdai Guangdong* (當代廣東, Contemporary Guangdong) (Guangzhou, 1995), 45.

of the 1950-1953 campaign to "suppress counterrevolutionaries" (鎮壓反革命 *zhenya fangeming*), the government employed its administrative presence to penetrate into local society, and confiscate people's guns regardless of the owners' social status or intent to bear arms.[3]

The tactics of mass mobilization developed in the revolutionary bases before 1949 had remained crucial in the movement of collecting civilians' guns. Several memoirs of local Communist cadres provided rich information on the day-to-day workings of how the movement was being conducted in local society. In 1950, the local government of Yichun County 宜春縣 in Jiangxi province decided to collect people's guns and dispatched work teams to towns and villages that were heavily affected by the proliferation of arms. The work team was usually comprised of a number of recently trained cadres and led by a "sent south cadre" (南下幹部 nanxia ganbu).[4] A newly recruited cadre named Wu Jitao 吳繼濤 was selected to join a team to confiscate privately-owned guns in Yichun's Hengtang 橫塘 township, a turbulent region that was known for lineage feuding and violence. He recalled years later that their gun confiscation activities would not be possible without the involvement of the masses. When the work team

[3] The campaign to suppress counter-revolutionaries (1950-1953) was the first political campaign after the establishment of the People's Republic of China to eradicate potential enemies. Those who were labeled as "counterrevolutionaries" were publicly denounced, many of whom were arrested and executed. According to Michael Dutton, the campaign "signaled the beginnings of a new tactic of socialist governance as military style campaigning was mimicked and redeployed in the realm of politics." See Michael Dutton, "Passionately Governmental: Maoism and the Structured Intensities of Revolutionary Governmentality," in *China's Governmentalities: Governing Change, Changing Government*, ed. Elaine Jeffreys (London: Routledge, 2009), 30.

[4] It was common in the early 1950s that the Communists had to transfer cadres to the newly acquired regions. So called the "sent south cadres," they were drawn from the areas already under CCP control to the southern provinces to oversee administration in line with the CCP ideology. These cadres were mostly from Shanxi and Shandong provinces. See Diana Lary, *China's Civil War: A Social History, 1945-1949* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 192; James Z. Gao, *The Communist Takeover of Hangzhou: The Transformation of City and Cadre, 1949-1954* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 42-68.

arrived in the town, their first step was to establish a "friendly relationship" with local poor peasants who were expected to provide more detailed information about gun ownership in the town. Wu and his colleagues were instructed to get acquainted with local peasants. To become highly interactive with the community, Wu helped one peasant with farm work for three consecutive days. The peasant ultimately agreed to tell the work team how many guns were floating in the town and who owned them. Through the mouth of collaborating peasants, Wu and other cadres became aware that the acquisition of guns was largely a community effort. In addition to the guns owned by bandits or local bullies, most individual guns were held by local elites, who were heads of either lineage or household registration groups (保 *bao*).

Upon receiving the first-hand information, their next step was to collect these guns. The efforts to collect privately-owned guns were to be carried out with a company of well-equipped soldiers to avoid the armed resistance from gun owners, as the cadres in the work team were not armed with weapons.[5] Certainly, the work team expected people to turn in their guns voluntarily. To induce people to give up their guns, the work team launched a series of programs of education and mobilization to involve the participation of all the peasants. As recalled by Wu, cadres went street to street, singing the song, "No new China without the Chinese Communist Party" (沒有共產黨就沒有新中國 *meiyou gongchandang jiu meiyou xinzhongguo*). Later, peasants were ordered to gather to learn the song, as a means to direct public feelings of loving the Party and the nation. In the educational meeting, the work team explained the current

[5] In many cases, the work team held public events to encourage people to surrender their arms, while the PLA soldiers oversaw the process and confiscated guns directly. Some other sources suggest that local people did not approve of the gun collection movement, which spurred armed resistance. In this case, bloody suppression ensued. See Jeremy Brown, "From Resisting Communists to Resisting America: Civil War and Korean War in Southwest China, 1950-1951," in *Dilemmas of Victory: The Early Years of the People's Republic of China,* ed. Jeremy Brown and Paul G. Pickowicz (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 105-129.

political situation to the peasants, and stressed that self-defense with guns was not necessary in the new China, as the Communist government possessed the capability to protect all the civilians.

Another mobilization strategy was to organize the poor peasants to report local elites who were reluctant to surrender their guns. This echoed the policy adopted by the CCP in the rural bases before 1949 that linked class struggle with mass mobilization. Those landlords or elites who refused to turn in guns were publicly accused in the public struggle session (批鬥會 *pidouhui*) in which poor peasants were encouraged to denounce their noncooperative landlords. Gradually, peasants were willing to cooperate with the work team. For example, a peasant reported a local bully to have a pistol concealed in his home. Under pressure, the bully was forced to surrender his weapon. A wide range of programs like this facilitated Wu Jitao and his colleagues to disarm the local people within one month and collected more than eighty guns in the town.[6]

This scene, recalled by Wu Jitao, could be seen in many places in early 1950s China, when the Communist government attempted to achieve exclusive authority over the localities. In the urban areas, gun collection was carried out by local Public Security Bureau (公安局 gongan ju), which first ordered armed individuals and groups to register their guns, which provided local authorities detailed information about gun ownership. Educational programs and gun confiscation would ensue. In Xiamen 厦门, for example, a similar movement was launched in

[6] Wu Jitao, "Daxiang shouqiang diyipao 打響收槍第一炮" (Firing the first shot of the campaign of collecting guns), in *Yichunshi wenshi ziliao* 宜春市文史資料 (Historical materials on Henan) 5 (1992): 9-12.

late 1949. Within three months, the city's authorities collected 499 guns and 9804 ammunition.[7] As such, the campaign to disarm civilians to some extent reflected the politicization of social life.

Paradoxically, before 1949, the Communists in rural bases had every intention of mobilizing the armed masses into the revolutionary project. As portrayed on the Monument to the People's Heroes, peasants who joined the fighting front with their arms were commemorated as heroes. The new Communist government's determination to disarm civilians, as Wu Jitao's personal experience indicated, ran counter to the practices in the rural revolutionary bases. In this sense, the year 1949 marked a turning point of the CCP's gun policy, shifting from less restrictive to resolute control. Like any other revolutionary movements, the Communist Revolution in China followed a dialectical process of expansion, consolidation, and centralization of power. In the expansive process, the power and energy possessed by the armed masses played an inevitable role in strengthening the CCP's military presence, while in the consolidation phase, armed masses' power became counterproductive and a threat to the new regime.[8] This is especially evident when the Chinese Communists sought to establish political legitimacy in the early years of the P.R.C.

The discontinuity in the CCP's gun policies across the 1949 divide to some degree echoes the main argument of this dissertation: the state's regulation and control over the armed civilians

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[7] Xiamen Zhengfazhi Bianzuan Weiyuanhui 廈門政法志編纂委員會, *Xiamen Zhengfazhi* 廈門政法志 (Xiamen politics and law), vol. 2 (Xiamen: Xiamen daxue chubanshe), 253-254.

[8] The term "dialectical process" comes from Phil Billingsley's work on the CCP's different policies towards Chinese bandits before and after the Communist Revolution. According to Billingsley, "in the consolidation or bureaucratic phase, especially after a Leninist-style putsch as the new revolutionary authorities seek to establish their legitimacy," bandits' energies are counterproductive. See Billingsley, *Bandits in Republican China*,265.

appeared as a contingent and dynamic process, which was determined by social and political situations. In 1949, China entered another phase of history. China not only recovered from one century-long period of constant military conflicts and imperialist invasions, but also witnessed the political decentralization came to an end. In contrast to the late Qing and Republican periods, the new state had the capability to assert its domination over society. An autocratic socialist system backed by military force facilitated the government to impose strict social control, in which the ban on gun ownership played a major part.[9] Though the Communist government in the early 1950s shifted its previous position on private gun ownership, it does not mean no continuity could be traced across 1949. Cadres like Wu Jitao in Yixing County adopted a similar strategies like their predecessors in rural bases. They accorded high priority to the mobilization of the ordinary people in the movement, and took class struggles as the key in the programs of either mobilizing armed people or confiscating their guns.

The movement to disarm local residents had not come to an end with the conclusion of the Campaign to Suppress Counterrevolutionaries in 1953. Even ten years later, privately-held guns obtained during the chaotic Republican period could still be found in rural areas. Some landlords who managed to conceal their weapons in the early years of the P.R.C were later reported by other villagers in the early 1960s. Another gun collection movement started in 1962, as a component of the Rural Socialist Education Campaign initiated by Mao.[10] In the suburbs of Beijing, for example, the total number of guns collected by police was 24, along with 4461

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[9] For the political system and political authority of the Communist government, see Zhengyuan Fu, *Autocratic Tradition and Chinese Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[10] After the Great Famine (1958-1962), Mao launched the "Socialist Education Movement" to counter bureaucratization and to revitalize the practice of class struggle in society at large. For a detailed introduction of the movement, see Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and After: A History of the People's Republic*, Third Edition (New York: Free Press, 1999), 273-288.

bullets. The sources of these guns were listed in an internal document preserved in the Beijing Municipal Archives. Three guns were concealed by two former landlords and one former *bao* head; six guns were found in the houses previously owned by landlords, rich peasants, and counterrevolutionaries; six guns were surrendered by poor peasants who purchased arms before 1949 to avenge local bullies; the last four guns were picked up by peasants in the field. Beijing Public Security Bureau then decided to display the guns and ammunitions in an exhibition that celebrated the success of the Rural Socialist Education Campaign. It should be noted that only the guns confiscated from "four bad types" were exhibited to the public, as the main purpose of the movement was to "reintroduce class struggle into local communities."[11] The government sought to use the guns owned by the class enemies to convince the general public how they suffered from oppression from the landlords in the past.[12] The case in Beijing was one among many. Owing to the centralization of state power and stringent control measures, the state was able to retain the privately-owned guns in relatively low numbers after the founding of the People's Republic.

Private Gun Ownership in Contemporary China

Unlike the Republican period, the majority of ordinary civilians in contemporary China are not obsessed with guns, and assault weapons are not omnipresent nationwide, as they are in the U.S. A report issued by the Small Arms Survey Research Group in 2007 estimated that the

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[11] R. Keith Schoppa, *Revolution and its Past: Identities and Change in Modern Chinese History* (Upper Saddle River: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2011), 348.

[12] Beijing shi gonganju 北京市公安局, "Guanyu zai nongcun shehuizhuyi jiaoyu yundongzhong jiaochu qiangzhi danyao qingkuang de baogao 關於農村社會主義教育運動中交出槍支、彈藥情況的報告" (Report on the collecting guns and ammunitions in the Rural Socialist Education Movement), July 7, 1964, J2-7, Beijing Municipal Archives 北京市檔案館.

number of privately-owned firearms (both licit and illicit) might reach close to 40,000.000. Per one hundred people, China had only 4.9 firearms reported and ranked at No. 102 among 178 countries. In the U.S., the number was 88.8 per one hundred people, and ranked at No.1.[13] Private gun ownership is less prevalent in contemporary China, which contributes to the low frequency of homicides and lethal violence. Owing to the strict gun control policy, many criminals find it difficult to obtain guns. For example, on December 14, 2012, a 36-year-old man from China's Henan province barged into a local elementary school with a kitchen knife, stabbing twenty-two children, none of whom, fortunately, was fatally wounded. A similar violent incident also happened in America on the same day. Conversely, twenty-six people, including twenty children and six adult staff members were shot to death by a twenty-year-old man in the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. As the deadliest mass shooting incident on school grounds in U.S. history, the horrific tragedy once again prompted fierce debate on private gun ownership and gun control measures among legislators and the general public. After the incident, Chinese media likewise drew a comparison between the two school attacks, and asserted the strictest firearm control policy of China prevented crimes from obtaining either guns or explosives. American Journalist James Fellow claimed that "that is the difference between a knife and a gun."[14]

The low rate of private gun ownership in contemporary China is a result of the strict gun control policy. In contrast to American gun law, which is designed to acknowledge the Second

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[13] Small Arms Survey, Graduate Institute of International Studies, *The Small Arms Survey 2007: Guns and the City* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 39-72.

[14] James Fallows, "American Exceptionalism: The Shootings Will Go On," *The Atlantic*, December 14, 2012, https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2012/12/american-exceptionalism-the-shootings-will-go-on/266293/.

Amendment "right of the people to keep and bear arms," China begins with the premise of forbidding the possession of firearms.[15] The Firearms Control Law which took effect in 1996 prohibited any private possession of firearms with extremely few exceptions, and the maximum penalty for violation is death.[16] The law defines the firearms as "various guns that are propelled by gunpowder or pressurized air, and that use tube-like equipment to shoot metal balls or other materials that are powerful enough to injure or kill people or render them unconscious."[17] The government deliberately uses a broad definition of guns to minimize any potential security threats. Even less aggressive air guns and replica guns are subject to the ban. For example, in early 2017, a Chinese woman, an operator of a fun-fair booth, was jailed for three-and-a-half years because she provided air guns to shoot balloons, though she was unaware the air guns were considered contraband under the law.[18] According to the Firearms Control Law, three types of firearms, including sport-shooting guns, hunting rifles, and anesthetizing guns are permitted for civilian use. To obtain firearms, civilians must obtain licenses from local public security organs. However, the permission is on paper only, as the licenses are no longer issued to ordinary civilians.

Gun control in China is both a social issue as well as a political issue. Initiated by the fourth-generation leadership headed by Hu Jintao 胡錦濤, China is constructing what it terms a

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[15] As for the origins of the American gun culture and gun control policies, see Joyce Lee Malcolm, *To Keep and Bear Arms: The Origins of an Anglo-American Right* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

[16] Laney Zhang, "Firearms-Control Legislation and Policy: China," Library of Congress, accessed August 15, 2017, https://www.loc.gov/law/help/firearms-control/china.php.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Alice Yan, "China's Gun Laws Attacked After Woman Jailed for Using Air Rifles at Fun Fair Booth," *South China Morning Post*, January 5, 2017, http://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/2059380/gun-laws-china-attacked-after-jailing-air-rifle-owner.

socialist "harmonious society," with the purpose of achieving social rewards that would reconcile social tensions and satisfy the interests of the majority. The signature narrative of present Chinese leader Xi Jinping 習近平, the "China Dream" serves the same end essentially. No matter how political leaders inspire Chinese people with compelling and motivating slogans, their practices and policies have to usher in an era of social stability and unity. As the *People's Daily* editorialized in 2005, the building of a harmonious society could not exist without public security and order.[19] The existence of unregulated guns, in the eyes of the government, had the potential to jeopardize the safety of civilians, which requires immediate and resolute action.

Despite the strict regulations, gun-involved crimes have been increasing in recent years and grabbed headlines of state-run newspapers quite often. One prominent case was that a fifty-five-year-old man of Hebei's Cangzhou city shot his fellow villagers unpredictably with a double-barreled hunting rifle in 2015, which resulted in two deaths and several serious injuries. The man then shot and killed two police officers when they tried to chase and arrest him. Hours later, Liu was found dead after he was trapped in his house. The perpetrator's motive was not clear, but it was reported that he suffered from schizophrenia. The extraordinary act of violence immediately spurred intense public and media interest. The media reportage not only blamed the murderer and condoled the victims, but also marveled about how Liu with mental illness got hold of the assault weapon in a country where private gun ownership is strictly regulated.[20]

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[19] "Weihu Shehui Wending, Goujian Hexie Shehui, 維護社會穩定, 構建和諧社會" (Upholding social stability and constructing harmonious society), *People's Daily*, May 24, 2005.

[20] "Hebei Cangzhou Suningxian Fsheng Teda Qiangjian 河北滄州肅寧縣發生特大槍擊案" (Shooting incident in Suning County of Hebei Province's Cangzhou City), *Lianhe Zaobao* 聯合早報, June 9, 2015, http://www.zaobao.com.sg/realtime/china/story20150609-489774.

The shooting incident, tragic and distressing as it was, is only one ordinary case among many gun-involved crimes that have been plaguing China's public security and social order in recent years. As the case in Cangzhou shows, even an ordinary villager has easy access to a gun, which undoubtedly increases the risk of violence in local society. The death of two police officers also indicates that the government's police, who are given legitimate right on the use of force, reluctantly find themselves difficult to maintain such monopoly. It seems that the Chinese government is very hesitant to disclose social evils (including gun crimes), which might indicate the governmental mismanagement. In contrast to these obscure official information, the social media has generated a broad set of reports surrounding the arms trafficking, illicit firearm manufacturer, and gun violence. In 2014, the police of Guiyang, the capital city of Guizhou province cracked down on a criminal gang and seized more than 10,000 guns, the largest number of confiscated weapons to date.[21] While law-abiding people are hardly possible to obtain assault weapons under the existing control rules, an illicit production and trafficking network has been forming underground, which supply Chinese crime organizations and the general gun enthusiasts with the guns that could escape government surveillance, posing a new challenge to the state authority and social order.

Though not prevalent in the whole Chinese population, the existence of a large number of illicit guns break the state's zero tolerance stance on popular power and violence, which in turn prompted harsher and more brutalizing actions against illegal weapons. In the year of 2016, the Ministry of Public Security launched a nationwide program to confiscate guns and eradicate

[21] "Guiyang Dixia Binggongchang Jiaoqiang 1.5 Wanzhi 貴陽地下兵工廠繳槍 1.5 萬支" (The confiscation of 15,000 guns in a underground arsenal in Guiyang), *Huanqiu wang* 環球網, April 16, 2014, http://mil.huanqiu.com/photo_china/2014-04/2732922_4.html.

underground gun market. According to the official statistics, local police departments confiscated approximately 178,000 guns, 638,000 replicas, 3,9000 tons of explosives, 7.77 million detonators, and 4.75 million bullets within four months.[22] Many circulation mechanisms resemble that of the ones during the Republican period. The ban on gun ownership and circulation creates flourished black market where guns were manufactured and trafficked. In the cyber age, gun consumers, manufactures, and intermediaries are connected online, which also facilitated the underground transaction.[23]

The increase in gun crime in recent years seems to confirm the causal relationship between owning weaponry and criminal violence. Based on the existing criminal cases revealed by the government and press, the private weapons owners are predominantly comprised of gang members and individuals acquiring guns to commit crime. Illicit gun ownership can hardly be viewed as an isolated crime. Rather, arms trafficking, human trafficking, drug trade, and other offensive crimes are intrinsically related and it is impossible to separate them. The acquisition of guns is often crucial in committing crimes. A prison officer in Shanghai has conducted a scrupulous survey on gun-involved crimes of the city based on the interviews with the police officers and criminals. According to this 2013 study, among the inmates who were arrested for the gun-involved crimes, 63.2 percent have previously engaged in drug trafficking, illicit

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[22] James T. Areddy, "Staring Down the Barrel: The Rise of Guns in China," *The Wall Street Journal*, October 14, 2008, https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB122394012224530655.

[23] In 2012, a Chinese report investigated that it was risky to ask about gun on the online forum, because it might be easily found by the Internet police. Thus, gun enthusiasts invented the "black talk," as a means to complete the transaction. For example, they substituted gun (*qiang*) for dog (*gou*). See Yang Jiang 楊江, "Heiqiang Diaocha 黑槍調查" (Investigating illicit guns), *Xinmin Weekly* 新民週刊, 44 (November 2012): 54.

gambling, and sexual transaction.[24] The evidence also makes it clear that the rifle or low-quality local gun is the primary firearms in most criminal cases involving guns. What follows are the replica guns, military weapons, and air guns. In additional to sporadic criminals who acquired guns for individual motives, a majority of gun-bearers and arms trafficking practitioners consists of the members of black societies and triad-like organized gangs. The presence of criminal organizations and their role in arms trafficking are not novel to China.

While it is fair to assume that most illicit gun owners today are the ones with purely criminal intentions, China in recent years also witnesses a rise of shooting enthusiasts and gun amateurs. Though the strict ban on private gun ownership, the government and general public's lauds over marksmanship have never been faltered. Rifle shooting has become an integral part of China's military training programs for college students. Since pistol shooter Xu Haifeng won China's first Olympic gold medal in 1984, he emerged as a superstar and a household name, and, for most Chinese people, the shooting sports were tightly bound to China's Olympic dreams. China's superior position in shooting events have become apparent in the successive Olympic games, as Chinese athletes have successively displayed their gold medal potentials. In some first- and second-tier cities, the government has sanctioned the private operation of shooting clubs, which would satisfy the country's rising upper-middle class's demands for stimulating and adventurous activities. [25] The North International Shooting Range located in north Beijing and the East Shanghai Shooting and Archery Club are the two major ranges for hobby enthusiasts to

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[24] Pang Yan 龐岩, "Sheqiang Fanzui de Diaocha Yanjiu 涉槍犯罪的調查研究" (An investigation on gun-related crime), *Guangdong Gongan Keji* 廣東公安科技 (Guangdong public security technology), 3 (September 2013): 16-17.

[25] Wang Jiangen 王健根 and Xie Lei 謝磊, "Shui zai Fanqiang 誰在販槍" (Who is trafficking guns), *Renmin Gongan* 人民公安 (People's Police) 23 (December 2012): 12.

relax and practice shooting at a high price. These enthusiasts (mostly middle-class men with legal occupation) are known for their buying power and the readiness to collect fashionable guns. It is now pretty apparent that a significant number of gun collectors frequently express their predilections for small arms and connoisseurship on many cyber forums for gun amateurs. One of such forums, which has more than 70,000 registered members contains sixteenth sub discussions, six of which focus on small arms craftsmanship, personal experience, and hunting. Apart from these cyber forums, many other QQ groups, BBSs, and chat rooms have provided these enthusiasts platforms to exchange gun information and help spread purchase channels. These people, though not in huge numbers as criminals, constitute another important gun consumers.[26]

The Chinese government is deeply wary about the armed populace, and has been taking high-handed tactics to stamp out illicit gun ownership. With China's rapid economic growth and the process of globalization, there has been a trend of the expansion of underground gun trade. As discussed above, both the criminal groups and some better-off Chinese people have growing demand for guns, adding new challenges to public safety. Certainly, it is unlikely for the ban on private possession of guns to be lifted, nor will it become a controversial political issue in today's China. A unified China under one-Party rule today guarantees the maximum effectiveness of the gun control policy. Conversely, as this proceeding chapters suggested, the political decentralization of the late Qing and Republican China kept the governments from constructing a consistent and effective gun policy.

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[26] Li Min 李民 and Gao Fengli 高鳳立, "Biyao Bangzhu zhi Zhufanhua 必要幫助犯之主犯化" (A transition from abettor to prime culprit), *Dalian Haishi Daxue Xuebao* 大連海事大學學報 (*Journal of Dalian Maritime University*) 3 (2015): 81.

Conclusion

Using government documents, criminal cases, popular writings, private memoirs, and many other primary sources, this dissertation has presented the multifaceted symbolism of the gun in modern China, and has shown how the prevalence of gun ownership influenced social life, and the dynamics between state and society. This dissertation has suggested that guns became invested with social and symbolic meanings, which were subject to change over time and space. In a period characterized by both disintegration of state power and rapid sociocultural transition, the word *qiang* (槍 gun) connoted different things to different non-state actors who sought to arm themselves during the late Qing and Republican periods. It was a tool to commit violence, a symbol of self-empowerment, and an the indicator of one's commitment to national politics. For successive Chinese governments, the gun in civilian hands meant either a social power that would be relied upon or a representation of a threat against state authority.

As this dissertation has argued, the multiple sociocultural and political implications of private-owned guns in modern China revealed the difficulty in carrying out a consistent and resolute policy towards an armed populace. As we have seen, in the context of the disintegration of central power, foreign intrusion, and political fragmentation, state builders from the late Qing dynasty viewed putting guns in the hands of ordinary civilians as extensions of state power, under the prerequisite that armed civilians were properly regulated. A model of what I termed "control/reliance" was shaped in the late Qing, as a means to maintain government coexistence with the armed civilians. Nevertheless, the equilibrium between a weak state and society was by no means stable, as the state's resolute determination to assert its legitimate authority was never shaken. As suggested in chapter three, the early Republican government's suppression of the Canton Merchants' Corps indicates that the state frowned on an armed populace lest they

threaten government authority, though armed forces like the Corps' important role in the province was acknowledged and even relied upon when Sun Yat-sen's revolution was in its expansive phase. Modern China's political decentralization determined that the balance between state and society swung back and forth. As chapter four showed, a sustainable relationship with the armed population led by local elite facilitated state penetration of the rural society, which, however, prevented the government from implementing its gun regulations, leading to an inconsistent and contingent policy. This gave the Chinese Communist Party the opportunity to integrate the armed civilians into its revolutionary agenda. The Communists in North China adopted the practice of class struggle in the process of mobilization of armed peasants in the 1930s and 1940s, which played a critical role in consolidating its political power and expanding its military presence. Finally, as discussed in this chapter's first section, the Communist government's movement of disarming civilians echoes the thesis of this dissertation that the state's stance towards private gun ownership was dynamic and contingent, which was determined by central power and political conditions.

Scholars based in both China and the West have construed the historical development of modern China in many different ways, but some key themes have prevailed. These themes have included: the parallels and contradictions between Western culture and Chinese culture; the protracted struggle between state-building efforts and intractable energy of local society; the constant military conflicts and their impacts on politics and society; the Chinese participation in a global or transnational discourse; the process of a grassroots revolutionary movement led by

the Chinese Communist Party; socio-political changes and their reflections in popular culture.[27] Most of these studies, fruitful as they are, however, are confined to a single aspect of China's historical trajectory. It should be noted that modern China was shaped by the convergence of these social, cultural, and political elements.

This dissertation focusing on gun culture and gun regulations provides a prism through which we can observe the interconnectedness and combinations of these elements in the making of modern China. It supplements our common knowledge of the gun, which, as the proceeding chapters argued, meant more than a tool used by soldiers to defend the nation, or held by police to maintain social order. As an exotic commodity, the gun links foreign technology with Chinese conditions, and reflects the process of how a once powerful empire was drawn into the whirlpool of global movements. The gun also enriches our understanding of the Chinese people – elite, peasant, woman, outlaw, new middle class, and many others. Their different motives and uses of guns, from another perspective, illustrate the impact of social forces on personal lives. A close look at gun regulation and control implemented by the late Qing and Republican governments helps investigate the bond and divide between government authority and social autonomy. The dual process of mobilization and confiscation of the gun by the Communists in the countryside sheds new light on how the CCP seized every possibility to further and deepen its revolution. Thus, it is not an exaggeration to say the gun is also a prism through which modern China's social change and complexity are refracted.

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[27] For the exploration of writings on modern Chinese history by Chinese historians, see Huaiyin Li, *Reinventing Modern China: Imagination and Authenticity in Chinese Historical Writing* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2013). For the American historical writing, see Paul A. Cohen, *Discovering History in China: American Historical Writing on the Recent Chinese Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

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